THE PROPHET'S WIFE

by

R. O. Prowse

EXTRAORDINARILY SUBTLE.
BEAUTIFULLY SINCERE.....
Manchester Guardian

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R. O. PROWSE

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PART I

I

When Susan Hepworth left the white road and took one of the dark peaty little tracks that led through the heather upwards to the ancient stones, she was doing once more, she felt, something she had not foreseen. She had expected an afternoon like the others—like those of the earlier years. She had imagined a visit that would begin with talk, and would drift through tea to tennis. "Come any day this week," Mary had said; "you are sure to find us in." But Mary had not been in, nor had any of the persons whom her hospitable "us" had covered. Susan realised, as she walked down the Allinsons' drive to the lodge at their gate, that her afternoon had crumbled. The unclaimed hours had an empty look, and in London, which she had left ten days before, her hours were not often empty. She was disconcerted; but she was also a little relieved. Certainly, she did not regret the tennis. She liked tennis, and usually played with some credit; but tennis was one of the things—things of the earlier years—for which her eagerness had lost its edge. She realised, too, before the lodge gate was reached, that she hardly regretted the talk. She had discovered that there were occasions when not to find people at home brought her a faint relief. She was not unsociable, but she had always been a trifle shy. Plenty of things were of interest to her, but it was only with people of a certain kind that she ever felt sure of getting on. Her self-confidence had not, as she had once hoped it would, been appreciably increased by marriage.

But with her relief to-day shyness had not much to do. One had not to think of what one would say to the Allinsons, who belonged to the friendships, or rather the affections, of the earliest of those early years. It was here that the

danger lay. For perfect comfort, they might have proved to belong too much. She had not thought of it on her way up the drive, but now, in the more meditative mood of her return, there was something in the scene itself that contributed to her misgiving. The house she had left behind, the creeper-covered lodge before her, the green tranquil dignity of the park, spoke of a manner of life and a point of view, of a deeply respectable tradition : a tradition that meant to her just as much as it meant to the Allinsons, but from which—from the spirit of which—she herself had a little departed. They were dear nice people, the Allinsons, who knew that the world had moved on and who had moved to some extent with it ; but they would have been too much interested in the success of her adventure, too much aware of the length she had gone, for their talk to have the old ease. Their interest would have been very kindly and considerately concealed, but she would have had to be on her guard against it. And this need for vigilance, of which she had become more conscious in the last ten days, was a thing that hurt and depressed her.

But, undoubtedly, she regretted her tea. When she stood in the leafy lane, with the alternatives of going on up the hill to the moor, or of going downhill the way she had come, her mind swung to and fro as the gate swung on its hinges. To secure her tea she would have to go home again, and there would be a flatness in going home. No one but her sister-in-law would be there to give it to her, and with Rose—it was horrid to feel in this way about Rose—there would be the same need for vigilance. On the other hand, the idea of a solitary walk had no great attraction for her, and though she had lived so near the moor, she had seldom crossed it alone. The incongruity of her clothes occurred to her. Her hat had been intended for Mary (it had had an intention of self-defence), and the shoes she wore were certainly not intended for heather. Her racquet, and the tennis shoes that were tied to it, would be an absurd encumbrance. The oscillations of the gate had ceased, and

the latch had given the last little click, before her mind was made up. It was the sense of relief that decided her. She did not care to have to go through with Rose what she was glad to have escaped with the Allinsons. She took her way up the hill, following the leafy lane until it had shed its leafiness with its trees and its hedges and become a bare moorland road.

Thus it was not in any spirit of adventure, nor in the spirit of one who seeks the new light that may come in waste and solitary places, that Susan left for an hour the world of her gregarious habits and let the white road guide her feet. She had some way to go before the fine freedom of the heather and the hill brought her troubled mind release. She was worried, depressed, unhappy. This walk of hers wore an aspect of flight, and the people from whom she was running away were the very people to whom she believed herself most near. In fact it had been to recover the sense of her nearness to them that she had come away from the others—those others whom she had left in London, and from whom too often of late she had felt herself estranged.

It was not until she had left the road and followed the wandering of the obscure little track for some distance through the heather that her oppression began to lift. She had taken to the track partly because her walks on this road had usually had the stones for their object ; and partly because there was a space of empty turf up there that would provide a good place for sitting. She was beginning to feel rather tired, and the racquet was proving a nuisance. She did not remember the way very well. The stones themselves lay over the brow of the rising ground, and were not in sight to guide her. The track she was following seldom appeared to lead anywhere in particular, and she discovered, whenever she came to forks, that she had forgotten which fork was hers. For most of its course the track was fairly dry, for no rain had lately fallen ; but in places it betrayed her to a squishiness of puddles and soft black mud, which drove her aside into the heather : this was not very good for her shoes, as the gorse, which

grew on the firmer ground, was not very good for her skirt. But these small adventures pleased her : they ministered to a belief that the wildness of the moor, though it might be of no great extent, was nevertheless quite the genuine thing. It came to her, suddenly, that she was very glad to be there. It came to her, like a voice from some older and more primitive self, that when one was young and alive and out-of-doors, there was little in the world that mattered ! She could hardly believe that she had been so reluctant to come. It was as if she had somehow been forgetting that she really had this side to her nature—the side that loved being out-of-doors, that loved these small adventures with a love in which there was something of an instinct of sport, and a great deal of a child's delight in pretending. She was glad to be looking again at the sober grey waste of the heather, with its quietness, its distance, the suggestion it conveyed of toughness and hard weather and the North. So far as the North was concerned, the suggestion was purely romantic, for the moor was a small remnant of wildness in the much peopled and appropriated South. A quite civilised landscape lay behind Susan's back—a Sussex landscape of ridges and hollows and threading lanes, of woods and farms and church towers, with the parks of gentlemen's places to add to the civilisation. But a suggestion was all she needed. The forks and puddles of the track, the pricking of the gorse, the rough going in the heather, were wildness enough for her purpose. And all the time the sky of an English June was over her head, and a lark was busy in the blue.

When Susan came to the stones, she rested. On the close-cropped turf she found a good place to sit—indeed, as she also found a stone for a back, the place was quite ideal.

Archæology was not much in Susan's line. She had a general notion that the stones had been connected with religious rites in some past incredibly remote ; but if learned persons had not insisted on this mystic use, they would have been for her stones like any others. They were

not in truth very impressive. The tallest of the four was barely four feet high ; two of the others were considerably less ; while the fourth was what, in her younger days, Susan had called a mere stump. They were weather-worn and a greenish grey ; they had yellow streaks of lichen in tiny clefts ; they looked as if—though how it was difficult to conceive—they might possibly have been broken off. To the conception of a circle, of which they had once formed part, Susan's imagination could never rise. A foxglove grew near the tallest stone, and there were tormentilla and eye-bright in the grass. When people were brought to the ancient place, they were warned not to expect the spectacular.

As Susan rested, as she secured for herself a little more comfort from the not too accommodating earth, as she fitted herself into the sun-warmed stone at her back, she sank to a mood of deeper contentment, and gave herself over to the keeping of the scene and the hour. They might do, so to speak, what they would with her : for the moment, mentally as well as physically, she was tired of finding her way. It was enough that she had managed to get there. And the place and the hour accepted, as it were, her surrender, and made their own use of her mood. She found that their use was kindly. They ministered to her peculiar need. They gave her back the thing she most wished to recover—the thing she was afraid she had missed: as memory awoke and old associations revived, the feel of the past, the way she had lived in it, the way it had looked to her, the way she had belonged to it, the way it had moulded her tastes and habits and ideas, came back with an intimate sense of recovery. As she looked at the world before her, she saw the scene not only as familiar and homelike, but as—with an innermost meaning—her own. It was hers by virtue of all that it meant and implied and suggested to one whose spirit its tradition possessed. That was what it all came to : it was not a mere question of the visible features before her, the church towers and the woods and the farms ; it was rather that she felt herself at one with those

other and invisible things that lay behind them and for which they stood—a tradition, a set of mental habits and tastes and affections, a tendency, on the part of those whom the tradition more finely possessed, to take, as a final guide, a deep-seated faith in the amenities. If you had a faith of this kind, it was not in your head that you had it, it was in your blood and your bones. Other kinds of faith might be just as good—Susan was not for setting herself up : the point was that this was her own way of thinking and feeling, and was not the way of certain persons she had left in London. She was seeing with a twofold vision : she was the more conscious of how things looked to her because she was also conscious of how they would have looked to *them*. In imagination she placed them beside her. They would not have been insensible to the charm. They would have done justice to the moor and the weather and the view, and would have talked about them very much better than she could. But her interpretation of the scene, her feeling for its social and human implications, her delight in certain aspects of the social order for which the countryside seemed to stand—this they would not have shared. Their attitude would have been critical—under provocation, it might have become definitely hostile. Beyond the singing of the lark she could hear the heavy denunciations of her friends as one may hear the booming of distant guns. It seemed to her now that she lived in London with a booming always in her ears. This, of course, was quite untrue : the people of whom she was thinking were eminently intelligent people ; and they were not so ungenial as to engage in a constant offensive. But whatever they might have abstained from saying, she knew the line their thoughts would have followed. She had attended their meetings, she had listened to their speeches, she had read their pamphlets, she had their arguments at her fingers' end. Her eye travelled to the tower of a church near which was an unseen village. For the reformers of those speeches and pamphlets that village would mean "conditions"—lamentable conditions of

servility and the want of all proper sanitation : would be a place where the houses were much too small, and the men were always touching their hats. And the land ! Ah, the depressing thoughts these people would have of the land ! For the land would mean rent, and rent would mean landlords, and landlords darkened the earth like hovering birds of prey....

But Susan was not unintelligent : this outline of her friends' position was a very crude caricature—and her friends were by no means crude. They moved in a world of ideas very much wider than hers. All the same—all the same she couldn't help wondering whether it might not be possible to know the " conditions " without knowing very much of the country ! And whatever the future might make of it, she herself liked the country as it was. The woods—yes, she liked the woods the better when she remembered that her men had shot them. They were nice, lean, clean, strong-chinned men, with weather-tanned faces and just the right sort of clothes. She had enjoyed seeing them off for their shooting in the mistiness of autumn mornings ; she had enjoyed helping to give them their tea, before nice big bright fires, on their return in the twilight of autumn afternoons. These gatherings might not have been intellectual, but on the whole they had been very jolly. And the land ? Something primitive within her stirred. She admitted that certain nooks and corners of the landscape were the dearer to her because she knew that her family owned them. It had owned them only for two generations—she would have been glad if it had owned them longer.

The lark was singing overhead ; the horizon of a distant ridge lay in a gentle haze ; a flock of clouds passing across the sun threw a moving shadow that was like a delicate bloom ; it was a world very still and content. A lonely sheep emerged from the heather, and came to have a look at the grass among the stones at Susan's back. It was an inoffensive sheep that looked unobtrusively around, and took Susan's presence for granted. She changed her position

and watched it. On the whole she was rather glad of its company. When it wandered off again towards the railing of a quarry that was just out of sight on her left, she turned back to the view ; but the thread of her thoughts was broken. For some little time indeed she thought of nothing in particular. She saw that a gorse thorn or two had stuck in the hem of her skirt ; her shoes were dirtier than she had supposed. She was enjoying the beauty of the view, but it occurred to her that she would have enjoyed it still more if provision could have been made for tea. Certainly, she would have enjoyed Nature still more if she had been less prolific in flies. Then, little by little, her preoccupation returned. She saw the landscape again from her peculiar angle of contrast, with that subtle and persistent reference to the point of view of those people whose opinions were too much on her mind.

This time it was the church tower that set her thinking. There was no end to the thoughts one might have of it, to the things it might be made to suggest and recall. The things, which in fact she began by recalling, Susan discovered on the whole were funny. She remembered the rector's reading. She remembered the fearful pace, and the queer way in which, in the most solemn places, his voice shot up in the air. She remembered dimly the hats of the girls in the choir ; she remembered one or two of the frocks she had worn herself ; she remembered the surreptitious alleviations which she and her brother had sometimes consumed on their knees. It had not been a very promising beginning. Who would have imagined that this little girl would one day be intimately concerned with one of the most modern of religious developments ? Susan's face grew graver. " Concerned " she certainly was, but was it, she wondered, quite " intimately " ? Wasn't she at bottom, right down in her heart of hearts, still that naughty little girl who had eaten chocolates on her knees ? Chocolates she ate no longer, but if, in the church of her present adherence, prayer had been offered on the knee, would the act have

meant more to her? Could any common act of worship express the intimacies of her spirit? It was the church of her opinions, undoubtedly: but was it the church of her faith? Had she, in truth, a faith? Had she anything more than that sense of vague recognitions, vague intimations, which was with her here at this moment?—the sense of the beauty of things, of the pity of things, of the mystery of space and great distances, of the irony of inevitable change. Oh yes, she was sure she had that—a sense of the pity of things, and a sense of the irony of change. The dear kindly old tower over there—how much poorer the landscape would be if there were no churches in it! But how often men had changed their minds since the day when the church was first built!—and how fast they were changing them now! Was she herself much nearer to a belief in the efficacy of the rites of that altar than to a belief in the rites of these ancient stones? The church was still a good deal more than a picturesque feature in the landscape—it stood for landmarks in the lives of men: but one day, perhaps, just like these stones, it would be only "an object for a walk." It was an idea not without irony, and the irony somehow appealed to her. It was as if, somehow, by this way of thinking, she were doing the old stones a good turn. What were they, the tower and the stones alike, but symbols, recognitions, attempts at making less vague the vagueness of intimations like hers? She had a feeling that there were great events lying beyond them—summer and winter, noontide and dawn, seed time and harvest, rain and shine, and decay and death and renewal....

And the church of her present devotion....

Suddenly, and quite irrelevantly, Susan stopped—stopped, and let it all go. She made a recognition which, if not very abstruse, was sufficiently frank and sincere. She resolved the person, of whom she had been thinking so long, into just one single person . . . and he was the man she had married. She admitted—giving the last pretence up—she had been thinking of him all the time.

II

Susan's return to Hildon Place, the house of the brother with whom she was staying, was made by a shorter way. She went back down the white road to a point where the leafy lane came in sight, and then, leaving the road, followed the descending hedge with which the first cultivation began. Though the grass of her footpath had heather beside it and there were gorse bushes close to the hedge, the moor on her left soon ceased to be the genuine thing. Little white flags, set low in clearings of vivid green, marked outlying holes of the golf links of Hinchley Row. The path ended tamely by crossing a mere meadow with a stile in a distant corner. But Susan welcomed the stile : its broad, nicely-rounded top bar gave her the chance of a rest.

Below the stile—it stood on a steep little bank—lay the road which connected the village of Hildon with the village of Hinchley Row. Hinchley Row, though it counted as a village still, was falling a victim to the golf links. In an ominous new road, which led from the enlarged little station to the links, there was a building of "desirable residences": in quiet lanes boards offering sites for the building of more had begun to enliven the hedges. Hinchley Row had come within reach of easy week-ends from London, and a good many business men, to whom the boards had not spoken in vain, went up to town every day. Still, as Susan was glad to remember, between Hildon and Hinchley Row there lay a good three miles.

At the point where the stile gave access to it, the road made a quiet bend. Susan, with her face in the direction of Hildon, looked down a hill of which she had a fairly straight view for nearly a quarter of a mile ; at the bottom, the road made another and very much sharper bend. A few

undred yards farther on was the lodge of Hildon Place. By the watch on her wrist it was only a quarter past five, nd with a little exertion and enterprise she might still ave secured her tea. She felt the more need to secure it in hat dinner, as she had been told, was likely that evening to e late. A certain aunt Jane, an important and impressive unt Jane, from whom, together with her daughter Gladys, usan's brother was expecting a visit, was due at Hinchley ow station a few minutes past seven, and a liberal margin ould have to be allowed for the conveying of aunt Jane Hildon Place, and for aunt Jane's dressing for dinner. evertheless, Susan lingered. She was tired, and she found he spot very pleasant. Buttercups were golden in the eadow behind her ; she had roses within reach of her and ; there were campions and mallows under the hedge n the opposite side of the way. After the freshness of the oor, the air of the valley was warm, and tended to a slight nervation. She found that something in the mere emptiness f the road made it restful to be looking down it.

Presently, she became more observant. Beyond the bend t the bottom of the hill dust was drifting over the hedge, nd she inferred from the slowness of the drifting—she could ot see the road—that it was raised by a horse-drawn ehicle. A brougham came round the bend. With the rise f the hill, the horse began to walk. Susan was not much nterested. When, however, the brougham was a little less istant, she noticed that the man on the box had not quite he look of a coachman, and yet, so it seemed to her, had look that she vaguely recognised. The recognition soon st its vagueness. The man on the box was her brother.

Susan was pleased. George was a person whom she was lways glad to meet. But one or two points perplexed her. he was not surprised to see her brother on the box : his oachman was serving on the desperate fields of France, nd George had not been able to replace him. But why he brougham ? It was many months, she knew, since her rother had used the car, but why a closed carriage on a

warm afternoon like this? Oh, of course, there was aunt Jane! The roof of the brougham would be of service for the carrying of aunt Jane's luggage. But why this early start? One did not start from Hildon Place at a quarter past five to meet a train at Hinchley Row at seven.

Susan came down from the stile. These little mystifications would give the meeting a further zest. She realised that, for one afternoon at least, she had had as much of herself as she cared for.

The brougham drew up, and she stepped to the horse's side. For a moment or two neither she nor her brother spoke. He looked down at her with an expression she knew very well. It was as if he were turning her presence to account.

"Hullo, George," she said.

He leaned over to the side of the box, resting his gloved left hand on the cushion of the unoccupied seat. The movement seemed natural enough, and many people would have seen nothing unusual in it; but what Susan saw sent a little pang to her heart. George had lost his left arm in the War, and dexterously as he managed the mechanical contrivance that had taken its place, she knew his peculiar dislike of it.

"Come up here, Sue," he said.

Susan was amused. This was quite in what she called his country-side manner. George had more manners than one, and with the persons to whom he spoke on or about his property he used a directness of speech, a taking for granted of things that were understood, which had the effect—so Susan, herself not comprehending, would put it—of a kind of shorthand or freemasonry.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

George smiled. "I am killing two birds with one stone."

"Aunt Jane, I suppose, is one of them?"

"Oh, yes: I meet aunt Jane by and by."

"And where else are you going?"

George sat upright on his own seat again. " Look inside," he said.

Susan was a little surprised. It had not occurred to her to look inside. She had not thought there would be anything to see.

She went to the window.

What she saw made her surprise considerable. On the cushions of the seat at the back, her head in a corner, her face flushed, her eyes closed, her hat not quite where it should be, was the form of a rather stout middle-aged woman, relaxed but not at all comfortable, in general a little unseemly. It was the form of her brother's cook.

" Mrs. Matthews ! "

Not only were the eyes of Mrs. Matthews closed, but Susan thought she could hear her breathing. " She's asleep ! "

" Thank God ! " came from the box.

Susan continued to look. " She's. . . ."

" Yes. That's why we are having this little drive."

" It's the third—the third time since I came."

" I have lost count," George said.

Susan recalled the times that had fallen within her own experience.

" Had you much trouble with her ? "

George spoke to the horse : flies were making it restive. " I found her," he explained, " sitting on the kitchen floor with her arm round a leg of the table. She said she was throttling the Kaiser."

" How horrid ! "

Susan's thoughts turned to Rose. " But Rose ? What will she do ?—with aunt Jane coming this evening."

There was sympathy in George's voice. " Yes, it's rough on Rose," he said. " Mrs. Fairchild, from the lodge, is coming in by and by. She will cook the dinner if—there's any dinner worth cooking ! "

Susan looked towards the window again. " What are you going to do with *her* ? "

"I am going to put her in the train for Stourfield. The journey only takes about twenty minutes. She has a daughter living at Stourfield. I have telegraphed to her. Phoned the message to Hinchley Row. Mrs. Matthews will have her box to-morrow." He looked at his watch. "Come along, Sue. Time's getting on."

But for Susan the condition of Mrs. Matthews presented a certain difficulty. "Had I better—with Mrs. Matthews like this?"

George gave the objection full weight. "I wouldn't have suggested it," he said, "if I had not been quite sure of Mrs. Matthews. But I know her various stages. The rest will do her good. She will behave quite nicely when she comes round, you'll see."

"Yes," Susan admitted, "she seems to be rather nice when—when she is not like this."

But a new difficulty, or perhaps a new set of difficulties, kept Susan reluctant still. Her mind was confused, and the only train she could think of was the train that would bring aunt Jane. She imagined a lurid vision. She saw aunt Jane, the rather alarming aunt Jane, stepping out from the door of her carriage, serene, possessive, with her queen-like air of expecting brass bands and triumphal arches, while she and her brother supported between them a nicely behaved, but no doubt still disabled, Mrs. Matthews. Susan found her courage fail. Aunt Jane was a person who had not the least little sense of fun.

"Come along," George repeated. "Mrs. Matthews must catch the 5.48."

The 5.48! Stourfield, of course, was *up* the line, and aunt Jane, who was not due till 7.13, was coming by a London train.

Still Susan held back. "I am so untidy," she said. "Look at my shoes!"

George looked, not at Susan's shoes, which he had noticed already, but at Susan herself. "You have not had tea," he said.

She laughed. "How do you know?"

"You have not come from the Allinsons." He indicated the direction of the stile and the footpath.

"No: they were out. I have been to the stones."

"Come along, Sue," he said again. "I will put Mrs. Matthews in the train, and then we will have tea at the *Crow and Harrow*."

Susan climbed to her brother's side.

III

There was not much in the garden of the *Crow and Harrow* but a grassplot and an old stone wall. It seemed to lie at the back of everything. That it lay at the back of the *Crow and Harrow* there appeared no reason to doubt, but in the dark stone passage by which she had come to it, after crossing the bar and a bar-scented parlour and skirting the obscurity of the kitchen, Susan's sense of direction had been lost. In any case, the building behind the table at which she sat looked like the back of their inn, and the building on her left—an old building roofed with stone tiles—looked like the back of the premises of an adjoining property. From these buildings the garden—or at least one side of it—gained something of a cloistered air. The other sides were open enough. On her right there were gooseberry bushes, with rows of potatoes beyond them ; across some untidy grass in which dandelions flowered and plantains showed ugly stalks, there stood the old stone wall, of a height convenient to lean on. The late sunlight, falling from the side of the bushes, warmed the building roofed with the becoming tiles, and made the small grassplot bright ; it shone on a corner of the white cloth on Susan's table. Beyond the wall was a meadow, through which a short cut, or kind of back way, led to an outlying cluster of cottages ; and beyond the meadow was a row of elms, towards which returning rooks trailed across the mellowing sky.

For the moment Susan had her mind at rest.

George, in point of fact, was a restful person to be with. Like Susan herself, he felt no need for constant speech, being, on the one hand, averse from a repetition of the obvious, and having, on the other, a distrust of explanations

as savouring of egotism, and a mark of persons deficient in form. He was seldom in a hurry, and he very seldom raised his voice. It took grave provocation to make him insist, and the gravest could not make him boast. His mind, too, was at rest. His confidence in Mrs. Matthews had been justified. Sleep had done her good, and she had come back to a world in which she recognised that a failing like hers caused too much inconvenience to be accepted as a frequent incident. She had acquiesced in the justice of her banishment, and had offered no objection to the journey. While Susan went on quietly with her tea, George smoked tranquilly in his corner of their rustic seat, and listened to the cawing of the rooks.

Susan finished her tea, and refreshed and restored, lit one of her brother's cigarettes.

They smoked in a restful silence. The rooks gathered in the elms ; they looked in the distance, which tempered their cawing, like bunches of large black fruit. From the path in the meadow came the voice of a woman calling to some one at a cottage gate. The meadow was below the level of the garden, and the path was covered by the old stone wall.

" If only," Susan said, " there were not aunt Jane."

George reflected.

Susan's mood had changed—the mood of her meditations at the stones ; it was perhaps as an effect of reaction that she had a quickened consciousness of his presence, that the sense of her nearness to him gave her a peculiar comfort. Some of the thoughts that had come to her at the Allinsons' gate, and had made her turn up the hill, had been, she now felt, a little morbid. And the quickened consciousness of his presence brought a kind of quickened observation. There were odd, absurd little things that she liked in him. She liked something just in the way he sat, just in the line of his easy but virile figure. She saw his face in profile, and it was in profile that she liked it best. His nose, his best feature, and his firm well-moulded chin, especially pleased

her as she saw them from her corner of the seat. What she did not like was the way in which that gloved left hand lay on his crossed leg. He was not reconciled to his injury, and she understood how intimately he revolted against it.

"Why is she coming, do you suppose?" he asked.

"To see me," Susan said.

"Couldn't she have seen you in London?"

"She never has! She has not seen me since I have been married."

"Ah!"

Susan winced a little. George's tone suggested that he might find more justification for the curiosity of aunt Jane than Susan quite wished him to find.

"Of course," she went on, "aunt Jane's not been in town more than twice in the last three years or so. The War has kept her busy. And I was away each time. I saw her the autumn before I married. She had just opened her convalescent home. She could talk of nothing else."

"Aunt Jane was one of the first in the field," he said. "Next autumn she'll have had four years of it." He flicked the ash from his cigarette. "Yes," he admitted, "your being with us, I suppose, has something to do with her coming."

Susan saw the matter more clearly. "She wants to see me because she dislikes aunt Frances so much."

George was interested. "I don't quite follow—"

"She couldn't bear my going to live with aunt Frances."

"When you left me?"

"Yes, when you and Rose were married."

George considered. "But that was six years ago. And it's three since you left aunt Frances."

"I know. I have been married three years. But I should never have met John, if I had not gone to live with aunt Frances. Aunt Frances is responsible for that."

"For your marriage?"

"Well—for my meeting John. Aunt Jane just wants to see how it has all turned out."

George's tone was light. " Wants to have a sort of look all round ? " But Susan's ear was sensitive, and she fancied there was discretion under his lightness.

" If she isn't satisfied—and she won't be if she can help it—she will visit it on poor aunt Frances."

George kept his lightness up. " She won't get the chance," he said.

Susan felt less confidence. " I'm not so sure," she sighed.

George let it drop.

That was one of the blessed things about George—he could let a subject drop ! You could take him with you a good long way, because he never tried to make you go too far. Susan had made this discovery in the days to which they had just referred—in the year, that is, when George and she had lived quite alone after their father's death. She had begun by being afraid of him. In the years after his leaving Oxford he had spent most of his time in London, and his returns to Hildon Place, though fairly frequent, had worn the aspect of visits. She had not had very much to do with him—she had never known what he was really like. He had not been her favourite brother (it was with Bertie, her younger brother, that she had eaten chocolates on her knees), and his eye had always intimidated her. It was the clear grey eye of the sportsman : out-of-doors, he seemed to be measuring distances ; in the house—so Susan had imagined—he had seemed to be measuring her. George had indeed an inquiring and observant eye, a look of being curious as to the things he saw, but it was the eye of a suspended judgment. It was here that she had found him out—he *did* suspend his judgments ! Curiosity would keep him tolerant, and he could be critical without being condemnatory. He had a pleasant way of leaving most things open. His mind as it worked dropped loopholes for doubt as an inexperienced knitter drops stitches. He enjoyed a bright cross-country run after a new idea, but a conclusion was a ditch, at which he had seen so many good men come to grief, that he looked well before he

leaped. He was interested in people and things in ways oddly like her own. And he was not too clever. He had brains—more brains than it had ever occurred to him to use ; but he was not clever all the time. He was good at business, and served on boards, and his interest in politics was keen ; you could talk about books to him whether he had read them or not ; he had an eye for a picture, and he liked to pick up old things. But he had plenty of limitations and prejudices and ignorances, and he never claimed more, with regard to knowledge in general, than to be able with luck to spot the people who only imagined they had it. There were matters, and a good many of them, as to which his mind was not open at all. And it was the sort of mind Susan liked. It was the sort of mind with which she felt most at home. It was good in a mind to be both open and shut, however wrong it might be in a door. She had discovered, moreover, that in spite of the rather challenging look which his virile features threw out, there was in him, as in her, a lurking distrust that made him a trifle shy. In two words, he had for her that precious but quite indefinable gift—the gift of being easy to live with.

In appearance, he so realised the type of Susan's meditations at the stones that it was obviously he who had sat for it. He was lean, and assuredly clean ; his cheek was well tanned by the weather ; his chin was sufficiently strong. In age, he was thirty-five, Susan being seven years younger ; in height, he was five feet nine, Susan being half an inch less. His clothes had the kind of " rightness "—and had it the more because they were a trifle worn—to which, so it seemed to Susan, only the " right " kind of man can attain. He had not a very upright figure, and his shoulders were not very square, but it could hardly be said that he stooped : it was rather that he had a slight forward bend of the neck and head, the effect of which, when he listened to you, was to give him an air of especial attention. He was a man who listened more than he talked. His hair was fair and a trifle

thin, and on his upper lip was a growth of close-cut bristles. His nose was the feature Susan liked best. It gave his face a saving fineness—a fineness that saved its virility from appearing a little too hard.

Presently, Susan herself took the subject up again.

"I am fond of aunt Frances," she said.

"You seem to have got on very well."

"We did. I was younger in those days."

George, she felt, partly caught the implication of this, but he abstained from attempting to lead her on. Seeing that she had put the end of her cigarette in her plate, he took his case from his pocket, and handed it to her.

"No, thanks," she said.

George threw the end of his own cigarette away.

"Aunt Frances," she observed, "knows plenty of other people, too."

George understood. "Yes, she knows some quite decent people."

"You used to go on Sunday afternoon, didn't you?"

"It was generally on Sunday afternoon."

"So you met the stranger sort."

"That was why I went. I liked meeting them."

Susan smiled. "So did I."

"They were clever people. One heard some good talk sometimes."

"Most of them were quite well-known in their way—people who lectured and did things. Aunt Frances had her first Tuesdays in the month as well—she has given them up since the War; but they were not very exciting."

"No. I dropped in now and then. One met just the usual people."

George was looking at the old stone wall. "It's a nice thing, that bit of wall," he said. "We could do with it at the end of our rose walk. It would look well from the drawing-room window."

"Has Rose been here?"

"Yes, I brought her one afternoon last summer. The car

had gone wrong, and she and I had tea here while it was being put right at Bennett's."

"I had never been here before."

"No?"

Susan was looking over the bit of low wall at the elms in the meadow beyond. The rooks, as they settled in the depths of the full June branches, appeared to become easier in their minds. The noise they were making grew less. Now and then, however, a bird would beat its way out with a noisy flapping of its wings to look for some less disputed perch. In the meadow, which she could not see, the shadows of the elms must be lying on the grass like a line of enormous giants. The old-world sound of the tinkle of an anvil at a distant forge, and the new-world sound of the hooting of a motor car, came to Susan in the deepening quiet of the air.

The impressions she had received in her hour at the stones mingled with her present impressions, and gave them a certain poignancy.

"Don't you wish sometimes," she said, "that things could be left as they are?"

George, not unnaturally, missed the application of this. "What things, Sue?" he asked.

"I don't know. . . . all the things you have down here!"

"In the country?"

"Yes, in the country. One wouldn't mind so much if the people who want to turn it all upside down understood how we feel about it."

A touch of grimness in George's face showed that she had him with her, but his tone remained judicial. "You don't think they do?"

"No. They are so absorbed in what they believe we shall gain that they never think of what we shall lose."

George remained judicial. "Can't you tell them?"

Susan laughed. "I! Oh, I can't put it well enough. Besides, on the whole, you know, I agree with them more

or less. I believe the changes have to come. Only—I so often wish they hadn't ! "

George had turned to Susan. " They *have* come, Sue," he said. " You'd soon see if you lived here."

Susan was still looking at the elms. " Yes, one does forget, I suppose. And the people here—the people aren't always so very nice."

" The poor people ? "

" No—our sort. We *can* be horrid, you know. And they really are rather dears—the people John gets about him."

" Ah."

The mood of her meditations at the stones had not yet let her go. " But there *is* something in it, I think. I mean there is something it's really worth trying to keep. I can't put it into words, but somehow, when one comes back, one feels one has missed it all the time. And "—there was both defiance and apology in her vague little laugh—" whatever it is, I love it ! "

George had not turned away. " You're in the wrong camp, Sue," he said.

" Yes," she admitted, " I suppose that's what it is. I believe I am very old-fashioned."

" You have not the reformer's zeal."

Susan sighed. " No. I am only interested."

The angle of the sun had shifted and the shadow of a tree behind the gooseberry bushes had moved over and beyond the table and had darkened a near corner of the grass. In the shade the air was a trifle chilly ; Susan shivered a little.

" Are you getting cold ? " George asked. " Let's move into the sun."

With some effort they dragged the ponderous seat a few yards from the table. Susan found the sunlight welcome.

" That's nice," she said.

Her thoughts strayed back to the London life.

" Aunt Frances," she reflected, " gets through a tremendous amount of work."

" She must have kept you pretty busy."

" Oh, I didn't mind that—I liked it. When her secretary married, I took on her work. I did all sorts of things. I interviewed people ; I looked after her engagements for her ; I typed most of her letters. I am rather good at typing, you know. But I got plenty of other things, too. I did the things aunt Frances didn't go in for : week-ends, dances, theatres, and lots of other things too. We gave some rather nice little dinners. And there was always uncle Henry."

George remembered uncle Henry. " He would look after the dinners all right," he said. " You would have some trouble to beat his claret. I expect," he added, " your not being dependent on her helped to make some difference."

" Yes, I dare say it did. I had mother's money, of course. But aunt Frances believes immensely in letting people do what they want. It is part of her religion, so to speak. It's one reason why she's a Socialist. It's true she does take possession of you—she can't help it—she's so tremendously alive ! She creates an atmosphere of her own, and carries it with her wherever she goes. You feel it's the only atmosphere there is ! But she is wonderfully understanding and interested. She's interested in whatever you want to do. And that's partly, I suppose, why she does take such possession of you. When you have talked to her about a thing, you want to do it still more. The people she doesn't understand are the people who don't want to do anything. And she can get on even with them."

George turned it over. " Do you think she understands uncle Henry ? "

Susan laughed. " I often wondered. It would be a pity if she doesn't."

" It would. His points are too good to miss."

" You see," Susan went on, " I wanted something to do. I had had a good deal to do down here—first when I looked after father, then when I looked after you. It would have been rather slow to go back to nothing but parties. Besides, I believe in having something to do."

"The War," George said, "has shown it's rather a good thing, I suppose. For women, I mean."

"Yes, and the Suffrage Movement showed it before. It gave us something to think about. It doesn't matter much what you work for. You are sure to get keen when once you have begun to work for it."

"I think Child Welfare was aunt's special line when I used to go and see her."

Susan smiled. "Oh, she had any number of lines! But some one did say of her once that she had a baby in her bonnet instead of a bee."

George turned on Susan his inquiring eye. "We must get up a mothers' meeting for you, Sue, while you're with us. You could give them some good advice."

Susan was amused. "Pray don't! Any woman, who has a baby of her own, could give them very much better. All I had to do with the lectures was just to arrange the dates."

"But you do speak?"

Susan shook her head. "No—you can't call it speaking. I sometimes say a word or two at our Conferences. We call them Conferences, you know—the sort of half debates, half testimony meetings, that follow the services at our hall. I only speak because John wants me to."

"Aunt Frances often appears in your pulpit, doesn't she? She carried me off to one of her meetings once. She's a good speaker."

"Yes, she speaks fairly often for us. John is an old friend of hers."

George looked at his watch.

"Ought we to be going?" Susan asked.

"In a minute or two. It's curious," he said, "that I never met your husband. He must have come on those Sunday afternoons. I met a Dr. Quoin, I remember. He is something in your line, isn't he?"

"Yes: Dr. Quoin founded the Movement. He's an American by birth. He lives at Leeds. John did not see so much of aunt Frances in those days."

"Ah!" said George significantly. "It was not until you arrived on the scene—"

Susan received the tribute tranquilly. "No. I hadn't much to do with his coming—except, perhaps, at the end. He came to make his ideas better known. He met people who were likely to be interested in them."

George rose from the seat. "Anyhow—he met you!"

Susan looked once more at the quiet place before she too rose from the seat. Her eyes were grave.

"Yes," she said. "And I was younger in those days."

IV

In the rose walk, as Susan saw it from her low chair by the window, the dusk seemed reluctant to gather. Over the walk, as over the lawn beside which it ran, there lay a deceptive dimness : but the cane sticks of the carnations, planted between the rose trees and the gravel, still showed as the beginning of a line. It was strange that the slender crescent of the moon should have so delicate and distinct an edge in a sky which was still so light. But the shadows in the room were deep, and Susan, whose imagination was ready for romance, welcomed the dim perspective. She felt a little excited, a little bewildered, a little elated, and more than a little alone. At the dinner table, from which she had lately risen, the first shots between aunt Jane and herself had been fired, and this moment of lull—aunt Jane was at rest on the sofa—was a moment for receiving impressions.

The room meant a great deal to her. There had been some changes, of course : in the days when she had been mistress of it she herself had made new dispositions, and Rose had made a few more ; but most of the things, the pictures and the cabinets and their treasures, which had impressed her childish fancy, or been the pride of her own possession, were there in the dusk before her. Odds and ends of the past came back. She remembered the prim little visits to her mother. They had been visits of ceremony and inspection, and they returned to her now as occasions when a very small child had been largely patted and pulled. However tidy Sarah had made her, she had never been tidy enough. Something about her, her little frock or her hair or her sash or something, had always to be patted or pulled. Her mother had never played with her. Susan's eye strayed to the piano. It stood where it had always stood, at the end

furthest from her chair. It was a long room, and the candles which had been lighted on the piano twinkled, for Susan, like lights in a distant window. It had been for her, this instrument of music, if not an instrument of torture, at least a cause of infinite boredom. She remembered with gratitude the story books she had learnt to balance on the music rest in front of the piece she was practising. Of the later years, the years of transition, her memories to-night were vague. Responsibilities had gradually come to her. After her mother's death, the room had been entirely hers. And then there had been the coming of Rose, and her own departure for London. And now, once more, she was here again, and she had come back—*married*. . . .

It was Gladys, aunt Jane's daughter, who had lighted the candles on the piano. She had ceased to play—she had never really begun ! but she was still perched on the music stool. Gladys was not much given to sitting in uncomfortable places, but she was given, Susan believed, to doing detached and desultory things. On a table, a little less distant, a lamp stood, the light from which fell on the rather Dresden-shepherdess-like figure of Rose, who was bending over her knitting, and on a white spray of aunt Jane's hair, which appeared above the cushion of the sofa. This wisp of white hair, like foam on a wave, was all that Susan could see of aunt Jane ; but she knew—it was Susan who had made her comfortable—that aunt Jane had put her feet up. This was the significant thing. In a moral, as well as in a literal, sense aunt Jane had put her feet up. Aunt Jane and she had had their first look at one another over the tops of their respective parapets (if modern warfare permits the image), and now they were down in their trenches again, and aunt Jane was taking her rest.

Susan's state was less gracious. This warfare was not a bit the kind of thing she wanted, not a bit the kind of thing she liked. She had come to Hildon to be with her people again, to be with people who thought and felt about things as she did, who belonged to her own tradition. She wanted nothing

less than to bury herself in a trench. As she looked at the failing light in the garden, and the brightening moon in the sky, she was conscious of being very lonely. This was the strange thing about marriage : there were times when it seemed to rob you of the last vestige of privacy, and times when it made you feel intensely alone. It created an illusive barrier of difference between you and your nearest and dearest. But when Susan's eye caught again the white wisp of aunt Jane's hair, her mood shifted a little. After all, the situation had points of interest. Marriage might or might not have done for her this or that, but one thing it had *not* done : it had not brought lines into her face ! She had seen this admission in aunt Jane's eye in the first moment of their meeting. In spite of the dirt on her shoes, and the marks on her skirt, and the general untidiness which she had displayed, aunt Jane had received an impression. And Susan, on her side, had received an impression, too. Just what it was she could not have told, but something had gone from aunt Jane. Susan had always respected, and even, with a reservation or two, really admired aunt Jane, but she saw her now, after an interval of three or four years, with a perceptible sense of disillusionment. At Hinchley Row, no doubt, Lady Wharton had filled the platform ; the platform of Hinchley Row was not very difficult to fill : Lady Wharton would hardly have passed unnoticed even on a platform at Victoria. All the same, she had not had quite her old queenlike air ; she had looked as if, for once in a way, she could do without a brass band. And this idea of a lessened impressiveness had been confirmed when they came to the carriage. Aunt Jane had observed the racquet. " You *still* play tennis ? " she had asked—the reference being, of course, not to the number of Susan's years, for at twenty-eight many people *still* play tennis, but to the world of high thinking in which Susan was supposed to live. But if aunt Jane could not do better than that ! . . .

Then there had been the horrid little incident at dinner Oh yes, it had been horrid ! Susan reproached herself for

having been clumsy and tactless and stupid. It was aunt Jane's Convalescent Home that had provided the wretched little pitfall. She had begun to talk of her Home in her easy and spacious way ; it was an admirable institution, where admirable work had been done, and any moderately tactful person would have left her in possession of the implication that the work had been done by her. Susan had pricked the bubble. With the eagerness of a rather shy person glad to seize an opening that suited her powers, she had taken the subject up. She had had no experience of Convalescent Homes, but as the niece of aunt Frances, and the wife of John Hepworth, she had learnt a good deal about the way in which organisations were run. She had contributed to their running herself. In perfect good faith, she had asked aunt Jane questions. Aunt Jane, of course, couldn't answer them. She had not been running the institution at all—she had merely been setting other people to run it. Susan might have felt she had scored. What she did feel was that she had been stupid and priggish. She had done just the kind of thing that aunt Jane would expect her to do.

Her glance rested once more on the white spray of aunt Jane's hair. It had an odd fascination for her. Fascination was the word for aunt Jane : she gave you so much to think about, there was such an immense deal of her ! It was curious to see that light, pretty, almost frivolous, white fleck on the sofa cushion, and to think of all the experience stored in the elderly head so tranquilly at rest out of sight. All the experience, social and human, gathered up in that worldly mind ! And in this experience what possessed Susan most was the impressive fact that aunt Jane had been married three times. She could never quite take it in. When one thought of all that it meant to unite oneself with only one man, the thought of uniting oneself with three. . . . Oh yes, she conceded a second chance. A first marriage was inevitably so much a leap in the dark that one was hardly responsible for it. Susan understood very well that a woman might desire to have a second chance : but when it came to

a third. . . . She felt it was a perplexing thing—this readiness of aunt Jane to be married. And, of course, there was the opposite side. Susan found some obscurity, too, in men's readiness to marry aunt Jane.

Over the accidents of birth and fortune she was inclined to pass rather lightly : Susan was far from unfortunate herself. Aunt Jane was her mother's sister, and the family from which they sprang rejoiced in the comfort and security of having owned their acres long, and of not being dependent on them ; the eldest sons had married prudently. On her father's side, comfort and security marked the position, too. In the years when Susan had known her father, he had been master of Hildon Place. But in years before her birth, he had been a solicitor in the City. It was his success in the City that had enabled him to purchase Hildon Place, and retire when he was still young. He had participated, to an extent not entirely professional, in undertakings in whose prosperous maturity the courage of their promoters had met with an adequate reward. At Hildon, however, no prominence had been given to the City. He had not been regarded as a stranger who had come to Hildon, but rather as a native who had come back to it. For he was a son of old Dr. Bousfield, rector of Denehurst, a village a few fields away. Susan's grandfather had been, besides, a canon and a rural dean, a man of ample independent means, connected, through his wife and his wife's relations, with some of the most considerable families in the neighbourhood. The rectory still told of his spacious days ; so liberally had he added to the house and the stables and the garden that his successors had been difficult to appoint ; the pleasant property, to which this cure of souls was attached, could be enjoyed only by a man untroubled by financial care.

Moreover, as Susan might fairly have reasoned, women do not necessarily marry three times because they happen to be of good family. Her thoughts, prompted by that white gleam of hair in the lamplight, turned to aunt Jane's appearance. As a girl, aunt Jane must have been very

handsome. Even now, at sixty-one, though her complexion was no longer good, and her chin had lost its simplicity, and there was a heaviness—almost a puffiness—in the droop of her cheek and throat, the upper part of her face conveyed a startling impression of youth. Her hair and her eyes were young. The gay feathery white hair was young—the younger for being so white. The dark eyes had a dancing light. Seen for the first time, or seen at some little distance, her eyes looked almost merry. They seemed to invite you to believe that aunt Jane was not so formidable a personage as she looked. But Susan, at heart, knew better. However much the dark eyes might dance, she had never seen them smile. When aunt Jane wished to be gracious, her lips could smile in a charming way, but there was never a smile in her eyes. There was always a hard unchanging look. It was a look that troubled Susan and hurt her. Did men really want to marry women whose eyes had a look like that? It was depressing to acknowledge that they might. It was more depressing still to have to acknowledge that men might marry women with eyes like that, and might not live to regret it. So far as Susan knew, her uncles had not been unhappy.

A vague disquiet troubled her. From the difference of temperament which that look implied, she inwardly shrank and drew away. On the other hand, she herself was a daughter of this favoured house, and a decorative well-staged existence had an attraction for her : all three uncles, as Susan was aware, had staged aunt Jane uncommonly well. Weyburn Court, uncle William's place in Shropshire, was a beautiful old black-and-white timbered house, with a distant view of Longmynd. The house in Elkington Gardens was also an adequate setting for aunt Jane, though Susan considered her own home at Hampstead pleasanter. Aunt Jane met the obligations of these establishments with a fine competence and distinction, and it occurred to Susan that the credit she had gained for the Convalescent Home was some proof of her aunt's efficiency. Susan felt she was

beginning to fumble at last with the key to her difficult problem. Add to these various gifts a glad resistance to the undoing of the years, and she could see in aunt Jane a woman who was likely to go far on her road.

And yet, and yet—aunt Jane was not really interesting. She was not interesting because, for one thing, she was not interested in *you*—unless, indeed, you happened to marry, or happened to be thinking of marriage. When her interest in a subject ceased (and it was astonishing how soon it did !), her mind shut with a snap. If you had not known where she had lived, you might sometimes have wondered. At dinner Rose had mentioned one of Conrad's novels. Aunt Jane had read nothing of Conrad's. Gladys had mentioned the Pioneer Players. The distinction between the commercial and the uncommercial theatre could not be made intelligible to aunt Jane. There was no end to the things, books and movements and ideas, of which she knew absolutely nothing ! A suspicion stole into Susan's mind that important as was the part aunt Jane had played, the play itself was just the least little bit out of date.

V

Aunt Jane stirred.

She raised herself on the sofa, and as she turned her head towards Susan, the lamplight fell on her face. The slight vagueness that the little doze had left moved Susan to a strange comparison. She recalled the awakening of Mrs. Matthews in the brougham. The idea of Mrs. Matthews may have been suggested by the idea of Mrs. Fairchild from the lodge, for it was to aunt Jane's generous response to Mrs. Fairchild's efforts that Susan attributed these moments of forgetfulness.

Aunt Jane's head returned to the cushion, and her thoughts to the matter with which they had been engaged before her eyes had closed.

" Sarah told me," she observed, " she would look after my things herself."

" Yes, that will be better," Rose said.

" You have not much confidence in—? "

" Florence ? No. I only took her because I could get no one else."

" Your cook appears satisfactory."

Rose's smile was unhappy. " We haven't one ! " she confessed.

Aunt Jane was interested.

" We sent our cook away this afternoon. She had become quite impossible."

" Drank ? " asked aunt Jane, briefly.

" Oh, she was dreadful," Rose murmured.

There was a pause.

A voice came to them from the candlelit shadows of the piano. " The *joie de vivre*," it said.

Gladys left the music stool.

She strayed to the table on which the lamp stood, and looked down on Rose and her knitting.

"It's a pity we can't all live in clubs. Private life has become too difficult."

"I don't think I should like that," Rose said.

It was pretty much what Gladys had expected her to say. She hovered above Rose as she knitted. The ease with which one could anticipate Rose's sentiments gave an added interest to the knitting. Her work and her sentiments went so well together. The fact that Rose was knitting only from a sense of patriotic duty made no essential difference. In spite of the daintiness and distinction of her rather precise, rather Dresden-shepherdess-like little figure—Gladys did full justice to her charm—Rose did suggest the recognition of duty : and this was just what she herself, Gladys knew, so eminently did *not* !

"But things *are* very difficult," Rose admitted, with a certain effect of apology—she liked to agree when she could. "I expect, after the War, girls will be glad to come back to us."

Gladys was not so sure. "I wonder ! I think it will be rather stupid of them if they do. They are probably having an interesting time like the rest of us."

She seemed to have hovered above Rose's chair long enough. Indeed, whatever Gladys might do, she had always an air of being on the point of doing something else. She took things in so quickly—as much of them, that is, as she cared to take—that she usually appeared to be taking things "on her way." And whatever her final goal might be, Susan felt pretty sure she would reach it. It was just here that Gladys was a little misleading. Her beautiful eyes, dark and deep, with a look of seeing beautiful things at a distance, the lightness of her figure, the delicate oval of her face, the odd suggestion it had of something a little Victorian, and of something that was more than a little oriental :—these outward and visible graces were a good deal at variance with Susan's conception of the force of her

will and her mind. For Susan, her will and her mind were markedly western and modern. While she herself was still hard at work on a new idea, Gladys, she felt, had already begun to look back at it. Susan believed you could tell her nothing for which she would not be prepared. And Gladys was six years younger than Susan.

Susan, on the other hand, if an interval had elapsed since their last meeting, seldom found she was prepared for Gladys. More especially, she was not prepared for Gladys's clothes. They were just what they should be, of course ; they were often in fact quite beautiful : but Gladys did sail near the wind ! She helped you to understand why certain people did object to those latest permissions (they were usually permissions to discard), of which Gladys availed herself so liberally. It had once been said of her that if she had not belonged so obviously to the world to which she did belong, she might, by the chance passer-by, have been taken as belonging to another. In the house, where every one knew all about you, this kind of thing did not very much matter : but in the street, more than once, the mistake, Susan fancied, had come very near to being made. Susan had seen a look on the face of a male passer-by. . . .

The look had made Susan uncomfortable. And the worst, or the best, of it was that the mistake went much deeper than the passer-by could ever have been brought to realise. Gladys knew the impression she made, and her amusement in making it was one of her queer perversities ; but *this* was not the real reason why she dressed as she did. Susan would have found the reason (had it occurred to her to look for it) in the fact that Gladys's way of taking life was generally experimental, and that it was always something of an experience to go to the furthest limit, if it were only in the shortening of a skirt. In the set to which Gladys belonged men counted among subordinate interests.

She came to Susan's chair near the window.

" Come out into the garden, Sue," she said.

Susan rose from her chair. " Won't you put something on ? I am going to."

Gladys realised that her attire was light. " Bring me something, Sue. And," she added, " bring some cigarettes."

A few minutes after Gladys and Susan had left the room, George sauntered casually in. He noticed the open uncovered windows, and rebuked the company for its negligence. He at once drew the curtains himself.

Aunt Jane, whose eyes had recovered their brightness, showed signs of being glad to see him.

Aunt Jane had a way of coming to the point. " What do you think of it ? " she asked.

George possessed himself of a comfortable chair, and wheeled it to a position opposite his wife's. " Of what ? " he inquired.

" Susan's marriage."

A surprise attack had seldom much success with George. His convictions, such as they were, were not kept at his fingers' ends.

" I don't know much about it," he said.

The insufficiency of this might have been brought home to him, if aunt Jane had liked him less. As it was, she said, " You have not met John, either ? "

" No. I always missed him."

" When you went to see aunt Frances ? "

" Yes. When I used to go to her Sunday afternoons."

Aunt Jane reflected. " It's an extraordinary thing," she said, " Susan has been married four years."

" —three," Rose put in.

" —three years, and we have none of us seen her husband ! "

" It's the War," George said. " It has kept us all so busy."

Aunt Jane was on the point of explaining how busy the War had kept *her*, but, though Susan was not within hearing —she abstained.

"You remember Gladys has stayed with them?" Rose reminded her.

Aunt Jane's relations with, or attitude towards, her daughter were marked by a certain reticence. There was a certain infrequency in her references to and her comments upon the ways and the doings of Gladys.

"She seems to have got on with John very well," Rose said.

Aunt Jane preserved her reticence.

"Sue," Rose ended, "appears to have a very nice house."

George lit a cigarette. "Sue says John is building a new church for himself," he said. "And a church is rather an expensive kind of thing to build."

Aunt Jane let a moment or two go by. She was now sitting upright on the sofa, and when aunt Jane sat upright, her impressive figure loomed. A massive repose had come to her from a long experience of authority. And the leisureliness of her manner added to her general impressiveness. Points raised by other people were not often of much interest to her, and sometimes she was a little slow in taking them in.

"The Hepworths," she said, "could build *cathedrals* if they chose. Those advertisements of theirs mean millions."

Rose smiled. "They are all along the platform at Hinchley Row—the advertisements, I mean. It is amusing to think of Sue's being connected with them."

"Is Susan amused?"

Rose considered. "I think she said once they made her feel more alive."

Aunt Jane sniffed. "That means, I should say, she isn't —if it means anything at all."

George's mind had a practical side, which his experience in the Army as well as the management of his estate had developed. "That gas engine of theirs is a good thing," he said. "The Hepworths are quite good people."

"No doubt. Susan, of course, has seen them?"

"Yes," Rose explained, "she has stayed with them two or three times. They have a beautiful place in the country, a few miles out of Arkington. The works, you know, are at Arkington. They appear to live very quietly."

"Did Susan like them?"

"Oh, very much. Mrs. Hepworth was charming to her. She comes of an old Quaker family. The eldest son has been managing director, or whatever it is, since Mr. Hepworth, the father, retired. Mr. Hepworth is a wonderful gardener. Sue says the gardens are really quite marvellous. They let people come and see them on Thursdays. It is the rock garden that is so wonderful. It's the finest in the North of England."

"Yes, I seem to remember hearing aunt Frances speak of the gardens. She stayed with the Hepworths some years ago on one of her lecturing expeditions. She came on to us afterwards. She told me, I remember, at the time of the marriage, that John was not in the business."

"No," Rose said. "He took up his present work when he came down from Oxford."

George was an Oxford man. "John wasn't at Oxford," he corrected. "He was at one of the German universities."

"Bad for his manners," was aunt Jane's brief comment.

George took a larger view. "His manners, I expect, are all right. I want to hear him speak."

Aunt Jane's expression hardened. Her second husband had been a politician of some account, and the evenings she had spent on his election platforms were not among the memories she cherished. "And you have never had the curiosity even to see what he's like!"

George retaliated. "Well, my dear aunt, have you?"

"I!" Aunt Jane was again on the point of alluding to her famous Home, but again she thought better of it. "I don't live thirty miles from London."

Rose intervened. "You see," she said, "it is not very long since George really recovered. It has taken him a long time to get over it—much longer than the doctors expected.

We have always meant to ask Sue to come and see us, but things have been so difficult. I know we have not behaved very well."

"Always the War," George comforted her.

Aunt Jane looked at George sympathetically. "You still feel it, I suppose?"

"Sometimes," he said.

"You would."

Beyond this aunt Jane did not go. She would treat the susceptibilities of men with a consideration which from women she usually withheld. She returned to Susan.

"You said," she reminded him, "you used to go to aunt Frances's Sunday afternoons?"

"Yes. I went pretty often. I liked them."

"You liked the people you met there?"

George recognised a distinction. "It was interesting to hear them talk."

Aunt Jane was satisfied. She herself seldom considered people from the point of view of the interest of their talk, but she understood George's distinction. "That was before Susan went to live with her?"

"Yes—before father died."

"Did Susan like the people?"

George, reluctant to be committed himself, preferred that Susan should remain uncommitted. "Sue lived in the thick of it," he said.

Aunt Jane smiled—with her lips, as Susan would have said, not with her dancing eyes. "Of course. That is how it all came about."

George felt that the sure hand of aunt Jane was gaining a firmer hold of him. He noticed that the candles, which Gladys had lighted on the piano, were still uselessly burning, and as a little physical movement lessens conversational strain, he got up and blew the candles out.

"That," said aunt Jane, "is just how she came to marry him."

George lowered the piano lid. He made his tone as casual

as he could. "Sue," he reflected, "probably fell in love with him."

Aunt Jane was not a woman of sentiment, but there was something about her that made it easy to allude to love.

"I dare say. She is not in love with him now."

"My dear aunt. . . ."

"Susan sees she has made a mistake."

George came back to his chair. "But how can you possibly tell?"

"I could tell the moment I saw her."

George looked at his aunt in his shrewd and inquiring way. Assertions of this kind interested him. He believed they were seldom true, but he could not feel quite sure. His own observation—and he was not an unobservant man—yielded no swift intuitions. It stood rather for a gradual collecting of impressions, with a judgment constantly deferred. But he realised there were people whose minds were more nimble than his.

Aunt Jane turned to Rose. "You know it, too," she said.

Rose let her knitting drop. This directness in dealing with things so intimate would have shocked her a little, even if she had been less fond of Susan than she was.

"Sue has said nothing to me," she began.

She felt it was not a very good beginning, but aunt Jane—it was a welcome and comfortable trait in her—seldom paid much attention to what you said.

"Aunt Frances ought not to have let Susan run wild—I mean, among those absurd friends of hers. It was not fair to any of us."

This was George's own opinion; but there was this difference between aunt Jane and himself that he recognised, and she did not, that their common feeling was not without an element of prejudice. He recalled what Susan had said of aunt Jane's dislike of her sister.

"I don't quite see," he said, "what it is exactly you object to. Advertisements—advertisements and all that kind of thing—are nothing to go by nowadays. The Hepworths

seem to be quite nice people. From a worldly point of view Susan has done rather well for herself. I gather his people are helping him to build the church—it's a largish order to build a church, but John himself can't have less than—what?—six or seven thousand a year. And the War must have been a very good thing for the Hepworths. I expect they have got some enormous contracts."

Aunt Jane followed his lead; if she was a person with whom it was easy to allude to love, she was also a person with whom it was easy to allude to money.

"Yes," she responded, "and Susan does him credit. She looks very nice this evening. Her manner is still very young, but marriage appears to have agreed with her. She had a lovely skin as a child."

Rose took up her needles again. The load had lifted a little. "Sue always looks nice," she said.

"Yes," aunt Jane agreed, "she doesn't dress badly. It is a pity she doesn't carry herself better. She has her mother's features, but not her mother's air. Susan looks ashamed of being so tall. Shy people shouldn't be tall."

"Women *are* tall nowadays," Rose reflected. She herself was not more than five feet three.

"No," aunt Jane summed it up, "Susan had no need to marry like this. Aunt Frances should have warned off those preposterous people."

George winced. He recalled the memorable Sunday afternoons of aunt Frances, at which his mental horizon had been so considerably enlarged, and "preposterous," he knew, was not the word for the people he had met. The perception of his own prejudice was uncomfortably deepened by the word. "I should hardly call them that," he demurred. "It's only that they are rather different."

Qualifications had little effect on aunt Jane. She quietly re-arranged the cushion that happened to have slipped from her back. "Isn't that enough?" she asked. "A woman should never marry into a different world. You can't get away from the instincts with which you are born."

It was George's own conviction : all the same, his aunt, it occurred to him, was being righteous over much. If the happiness of Gladys had been in question, her mother might have revealed a less inelastic code. Considerable allowance must be made, he felt, for the bias against aunt Frances. " I know. But most differences nowadays have got worn a trifle thin. It's not always easy to see just where they do come in."

" Besides," Rose intervened, " Susan *is* different, you know. Being so much with aunt Frances has made a great difference in her. She is used to that kind of life. She wouldn't be happy now without work of some sort :—and she does understand John's views."

No impression was made on aunt Jane. Her attention was engaged by the cushion. " What are his views—can you tell me ? I have not found any one who can."

" He calls himself an Ethical lecturer."

" And what on earth is an Ethical lecturer ? "

George was averse from explanations of most kinds, and was not ready for the details of this. " It is a form of religion, I take it. They have a regular service—lessons and hymns and things. Sue told us about it the other evening. Aunt Frances speaks at their place sometimes."

" At the service, you mean ? "

" Yes. She delivers what Sue calls the Discourse. I suppose we should call it the sermon."

" Does Susan. . . . deliver the Discourse ? "

George smiled. " No. I don't think she has got quite so far at present. But there's no knowing what she may come to."

Aunt Jane's imperturbability rested on deep convictions, and they were not softened by a sense of fun. " It sounds very silly," she said. " Very silly indeed."

Her gravity appeared excessive. " How about aunt Frances ? " he hinted.

The question, in one form or another, had been asked so often that aunt Jane had acquired a formula for answering it. " Aunt Frances," she said, " has her own special gift."

To which, a little more brightly, she added, " Besides, it is one thing to speak at a man's service, and another thing to marry the man."

At this point Gladys came in from the garden. Her mother's last words reached her.

" Discussing Sue ? " she inquired.

The fact was too obvious for denial, but there was no need to record it.

" Where is she ? " George asked.

" She went in by the side door. She has gone to say good-night to Sarah."

Gladys took off the wrap which Susan had brought her, and let it drop on Susan's chair. She stood, for a moment or two, looking a little vaguely at the others, uncertain on which to alight, hovering as a bird may hover before it chooses an appropriate perch. Through the dim perspective of the shadows she gleamed like a delicate bird of gay plumage, poised on a delicate leg. In the end she decided for Rose, towards whom she tripped with bright short little steps.

" It must be rather exciting to be the wife of a prophet," she said. " Most of your time would be spent dodging the stones."

George would have liked to catch her eye. He always wanted to look at people when they said things like that. And at Gladys, of course, no one was ever unwilling to look. No doubt, now and then, she did sail near the wind, but from the women of her race she had inherited a distinction which left a margin for taking small liberties. George's reason for looking, however, was not so much that Gladys was good to look at as that he divined in her—queer as the divination seemed—a sagacity, which somehow responded to his own. The bond of a disillusionment common to them both made the finer reference of their intercourse. Her odd intuitions did more than amuse him : he found them of intrinsic interest.

And now, though he would have liked her to meet his eye,

he had no illusions as to why she didn't. He knew that her look of seeing a distance of beautiful things was just a little deceptive. Gladys, in point of fact, did see George—and she entirely liked what she saw ! She had Susan's sense of the " rightness " of his lean virility.

" You might get mixed up in his mantle," he said.

Gladys smiled : and Gladys, like her mother, did not smile with her eyes. " Yes, one would have to be careful," she said. " One would have to see he didn't wear it in the house."

The whir of a faint but insistent ringing came to them suddenly from the hall.

" That's your telephone, isn't it ? " she asked.

George half rose from his chair.

" No—please let me go and answer it. I feel like saying something nice."

George dropped back in the chair. " See first who it is," he said. " I will come, if I'm wanted."

The length of Gladys's absence suggested that he was not wanted. And the untroubled serenity of her face, when she came back to them, tended to confirm this conjecture.

" Did you say it ? " George asked.

Gladys shook her head. " He didn't give me the chance. He talked all the time himself."

" *He ?* "

" He thought I was one of the maids. It was all one tremendous message ! "

" Not for us ? " Rose ventured to hint.

" Oh, of course ! It was all for you ! "

" You wouldn't care to tell us who it was ? "

Gladys's expression seemed innocent of all design. " It was the prophet himself."

" John ! "

" I don't think he would have remembered who I was, even if I had had time to tell him."

" And what was the message ? " Rose asked.

" Oh, it was very difficult ! And I couldn't hear very

well. It seemed to have something to do with Bertie. But John will tell you himself. He appears to be coming down here on Monday."

"The day after to-morrow!"

"Yes—so he said."

Rose's needles once more dropped to her lap. "My dear!"

Gladys, detached, serene, beyond reach of all trivial vicissitudes, showed no sense of triumph in her obvious possession of the scene. But she recognised the claim of the others, and would give them what help she could.

"You will be immensely disappointed," she said. "When he is not wearing his mantle, John is very much like other people. At least, he *may* be. He isn't—*sometimes*." Her eyes had their look of seeing distant, beautiful things. "His trousers," she added, "are not even baggy at the knees."

PART II

I

The discussion was not going well. The architect, a man with a refined authoritative voice, who spoke a strange imaginative language which suggested any art but his own, and the contractor who was accustomed to bully every one except the more prominent architects who put work in his way, were finding John Hepworth difficult. And Hepworth, who was too much an artist himself to be impressed by artistic jargon, and too much a Hepworth ever to be bullied at all, had practically lost his temper.

"I feel it as a passage in stone," the architect said.

"You show a want of imagination," said Hepworth, simply.

The eyes of the architect rested on the poles and planks of the scaffolding in which the unfinished church was enfolded, but what he saw was the impossibility of this man Hepworth. It was impossible to go on with him, it was too late to give him up. His suggestions were a grave impertinence, his criticism was quite intolerable. He had committed an unpardonable offence. For three points only did Sir Phillip Burbage allow his clients to bring to his notice : they might tell him the kind of building that they desired to erect—his genius was not exclusively devoted to churches ; they might mention the amount of money it was their intention to spend ; and he was glad to know the locality for which he had to prepare. When these points had been settled, the suggestions of his clients became no more to him than a nuisance of buzzing flies. He exacted a hand of complete freedom as a concession of mere civility. But this man Hepworth. . . .

"We are not building a peep-show," he said.

Hepworth winced. He had confidence in his own taste,

and as much confidence in his own judgment as a man ever has who is as sensitive as he is tenacious ; but he was suspected, he knew, of a certain love of effect. The art he more especially practised was the art of the platform and pulpit, and he realised that he failed to dissociate this art, with some of his more critical admirers, from the kindred art of the stage.

"No," he said, "we are building a temple of the Holy Ghost."

Burbage looked at his dusty boots. He did not like his boots to be dusty. The dust on his boots, and the hot June sun on the back of his head, brought the falseness of his position home to him. He had compromised his dignity in accepting Hepworth's appointment.

On other occasions he had done full justice to the site. It was remarkable that a vacant space, which met so many desirable conditions, should have been found even in Hampstead. The Finchley Road, with its abundant facilities of approach, was only a few hundred yards below :—the pitch of the hill was steep. The church would not be visible from the Finchley Road, except perhaps to persons on the further pavement or on the top of a passing bus, for the houses and gardens of another road intervened : but the spire, the Christian and crocketed spire, would be a landmark in that part of London. The spot itself had a pleasantness, though the dust and the sun and John Hepworth—especially Hepworth—made Burbage indifferent to it. A look of the country survived. The road, on which he was standing, was unenclosed, and rose in a sharp little hump. At a little distance, on his right, on the side of the Finchley Road, two houses had lately been built—modern, decorative, opulent houses, with gardens that secured their privacy. On his left was a last little patch of wildness—the small grassy slope of what had once been a country field, with a bit of wild hedge at the top of it : a hedge in which there were elder trees, and one quite beautiful elm. The gardens of the houses in the surrounding Avenues—

Bamborough Avenue, Borrowdale Avenue, Singapore Avenue, and the rest—were gay with rambling roses. It might be said that the worship of the new church would have its setting in a cult of Dorothy Perkins. When the War was over and building could be resumed, this last patch of wildness would go ; there would be one Avenue the more of opulent decorative houses : but the opulent houses would at least have gardens, and the gardens were sure to have roses.

The church was being built on what remained of the field on the side of the Finchley Road. At present the poles of the scaffolding were practically all you could see of it. The grass of the field had been trodden down, strewn with a litter of dust and rubbish ; the wheels of the contractor's carts and lorries had left a line of deep furrows. On the other side of the road was a colony of sheds and shanties, low, wooden, makeshift erections with corrugated iron roofs, through one of which the funnel of a silent engine protruded. The wooden office of the contractor, with his name on a small sky-sign above it, and his City address and telephone number painted below the window, stood by the side of the road. The place was entirely quiet. No work had been done for two years.

Though Burbage looked at his dusty boots, he had heard what Hepworth had said. Hepworth's phrase had jarred on him. There was enough of conscious affectation in the unusualness of his own speech to make him sensitive to unusualness in the speech of other people. He had an Englishman's preference for the usual—the preference of his Public School and University tradition. He missed this tradition in Hepworth. He missed it the more because a man of Hepworth's learning, Hepworth's weight, ought somehow, he felt, to have it.

" A temple of the modern spirit," he reflected, " is rather what I should have expected you to say."

Hepworth's voice had a different note. " The modern spirit, in its finest manifestations, *is* the Holy Ghost," he said.

"Ah," Burbage murmured.

He disliked Hepworth's voice. The refined modulation of his own tones never lost its authoritative smoothness: whatever his company might be, he kept an intonation of conventional precision. His voice unmistakably placed him. Hepworth's voice, on the other hand, as unmistakably put him apart. It was a voice the individuality of which was very marked indeed: a voice rich, virile, variable, free from any note of solicitude—even a solicitude to please, but with a kind of glad little lilt in it, something spontaneous and buoyant, something younger than his forty years. It was the voice of a man of abounding vitality, whose speech was habitually emotional. His voice contributed to the diversity of impression that his many-sided personality conveyed. He was tall, of a build muscular rather than athletic; he kept in private life the air of a presence that made his figure impressive on the platform. He was dark, with black hair close-cut but abundant, and a little inclined to wave—especially in the lock brushed back from his forehead at the parting. He had a fine head, broadly and massively moulded; his face was of a strong North country type, tempered and relieved by a refinement of intellectual distinction. The absence of colour in his clean-shaven cheek was due to no want of health. He was dressed for the summer afternoon in an easy tweed suit, with a straw hat and brown shoes, but his coat had the cut of a well-chosen tailor, and in general he looked well-groomed. He had the confidence and ease of a position abundantly assured. But he conformed to no social type. No profession had set its mark on him, and something in his dark eye intrigued you, and discouraged too ready assumptions. The impressiveness of his bearing had to be adjusted, in any impression you formed of him, to the impulsiveness of his manner and speech—when, that is, his manner and speech were impulsive. His manner was often restrained enough. Hitherto, for the most part, in deference to Burbage's convention, he had been as restrained as he:

but when he let the convention go, his voice had the effect of suggesting in Burbage the existence of a suspicion of leanness.

"Probably," Burbage observed, "we do not mean the same thing. By the Holy Ghost," he added.

"Probably not," Hepworth said.

Pemblestone, the contractor, saw that he must intervene. He was a lean large man with an atrocious jaw and the probability of a Nonconformist origin. Time was money, he felt—especially when it was your country that had the first claim on it; and it was not right to let a business discussion degenerate in this way into an argument about the Holy Ghost. Pemblestone was a man of principle.

"It would cost you another five hundred," he said.

"I would have it," said Hepworth, "if it cost me another five thousand."

Pemblestone smiled. He thought Hepworth a fool, but he liked to hear a man jingle his money. It gave him a sense of something doing.

"It's too late," he said, more genially, "we've got too far. It would mean sacrificing two months' work."

"Two months!" Hepworth's voice rang out. "What are two months when we are building for a thousand years!"

Pemblestone placed an epithet before the "fool." "With the kind of stuff we have to use—my Lord!" But this, of course, Pemblestone abstained from saying. Moreover, though Hepworth might be a fool, he was a fool only in what he said—and not always in that. He saw that Hepworth would gain his point, and that Burbage would have to climb down. But while to make Sir Phillip Burbage climb down was, so to speak, a feat in his own line of business, it was not a proceeding at which he desired to assist.

"Well," he said, "I must be getting along. I have to look in at the Ministry of Munitions before I go back."

"There are no Saturday afternoons at the Ministry of

Munitions?" Hepworth asked. "They treat us better at the Ministry of Reconstruction."

Pemblestone grinned. "Not for me. The man I have an appointment with goes back to France to-night. Well, I'll leave you and Sir Phillip to settle it, Mr. Hepworth," he added. "You can take your time, I reckon. They don't expect the War will be over next week."

"At the Ministry of Munitions?"

Pemblestone nodded. "They're looking some way ahead."

He glanced for a moment at his own abandoned operations: then he turned to go. "Well, good day, Mr. Hepworth. Good day, Sir Phillip," he added.

"Good day, Pemblestone," said Burbage, blandly.

Pemblestone walked away in the direction of the Finchley Road.

II

The discussion was not renewed. Burbage had not Pemblestone's clear perception of the certainty of his own surrender ; but that for once the man who paid the piper might insist on calling the tune was a contingency he was obliged to contemplate. He believed the contemplation would be less unpleasant in a place less exposed to the sun. Hepworth, too, had had enough. The instincts of the habitual and unyielding fighter were tempered in him by a sensitive sense of generosity ; he was experiencing just that shade of compunction for his own insistence that may make a cessation of hostilities welcome. But that was as far as he went. Consciously, perhaps, he did not go quite so far. The assumptions of Burbage, professional, intellectual, social—his complacency had a social tinge—appeared altogether ridiculous and insufferable.

Nevertheless, he offered him tea. Hepworth himself was very fond of his tea. And the war path, on which he fought so valiantly, often led to the door of his hospitable tent.

" Let me give you some tea," he said. " My house is only three minutes' walk from here. I am sorry to say my wife is not with me just now—she is staying with her brother in Sussex. But I think we shall find tea ready for us."

Burbage declined his offer, and did not decline very civilly. Hepworth's recovery of temper had the effect of a deeper provocation for Burbage. It was a very high horse that bore him back, when he had taken his leave, to the communications of the Finchley Road.

Hepworth lingered. He gave Burbage a decent interval in which to reach the end of the road, and then turned in the same direction himself.

Two women were coming up the road. Hepworth, who

was never interested in the passer-by, would not have seen them, if the taller of the two had not come across and spoken to him.

"Mr. Hepworth," she said.

For an instant he failed to recognise her. The unpleasantness of his talk with Burbage still had possession of him. He atoned for his failure by the increased cordiality of his greeting.

"Miss Burrows! To think of finding *you* on these lonely heights! Is it possible you are making a pilgrimage? Can it be the sacred shrine. . . ."

Miss Burrows smiled.

"I often come this way," she said. "I live at Hampstead —higher up still. I have brought a friend to see the church."

"A friend?" Hepworth had not noticed the friend. "Ah," he added, as the friend joined Miss Burrows.

Miss Burrows introduced her friend. "Miss Priestman and I live together," Miss Burrows explained.

Hepworth remembered Miss Priestman. "I know your face," he said. "You have spoken at some of our Conferences."

"Yes," Miss Priestman admitted—the admission had a shade of reserve. "I come sometimes with Miss Burrows."

"Miss Priestman is not a member," Miss Burrows put in. "It's the kinder of her to give us what help she can."

Miss Priestman, who recalled the direction in which the spirit had moved her, was not for taking too much credit. "I am afraid I have been rather critical. . . ."

Hepworth remembered this, too. "Ah, but wise criticism is just what we need," he added.

He turned back towards the church. "There is not much to be seen except poles," he said; "but I should like to show you the little there is."

Miss Burrows was a tall, doubtfully dressed woman in the middle thirties, with a certain large impressiveness of figure. She had about her something eminently assured and responsible and mature—the look of the self-reliant work-aday woman who knows that her work is good. She held one

of the higher appointments in the Savings Bank department of the Post Office, and controlled the labours of many young women at its august head quarters in Blythe Road. But Blythe Road did not account for her. Her kind intelligent eyes were much more than the eyes of practical efficiency : they looked like the eyes of faith. Miss Priestman, who had much the same competent air, was a good deal shorter, a good deal smaller, a little younger, and had a little more colour both in her cheek and in the trimming of her hat ; she had small sharp features, a quick disarming little laugh, and critical inquisitive eyes. The school, in which she had been a mistress, had failed in the early days of the War, and she had found refuge in a post, which a very clear head had secured for her, in the Lombard Street chief office of a bank.

They paused before the church. To save the two women from the dust of the road, Hepworth, who was considerate in most small matters, took them to a point in the field above the building, and a little beyond the shanties.

The poles of the scaffolding, which were like bare masts in a crowded port, did not lend themselves to appreciative comment ; but Miss Burrows admired the view.

" It is a beautiful site," she said.

" Yes, I think so," Hepworth agreed.

" But isn't it " — Miss Priestman hesitated — " rather far out ? Won't people have rather a long way to come ? If," she added, " you expect to get the same people."

" Oh yes, we hope to keep our present members. But they come from all parts, you see, and for some of them this will be no further than our present hall. A good many live in the North of London."

" There are plenty of buses in the Finchley Road," Miss Burrows said. " They will bring you from almost anywhere."

Miss Priestman's eyes looked mischievous. " You won't have to rely, then, on the support of the Hampstead highbrows ? "

Hepworth caught the mischief. "I suspect the brows of most of the people who live round here"—he indicated the surrounding Avenues—"are not at all above the normal height. But I am inclined to put my trust—like Miss Burrows—in the buses of the Finchley Road."

"We did try," said Miss Burrows, who was a member of Hepworth's committee, "to find a more central situation."

"Yes, we looked for one everywhere," Hepworth said, "but we could find nothing to suit us. The cost of a good site would have been simply enormous. It is not enough to be central, you know—it's as important to be conspicuous: and a central back street is all we should have been able to afford. That wouldn't have done much for us. The plot we are building on was a gift from one of our members. He secured the land with the idea of building a house himself, but his wife died, and he went to live in the country. It was too good an offer to refuse. Up here we shall be seen even if we are not heard. Our spire"—there was humour in the gesture he made—"will shine out among the 'beacons of the wise'!"

"There will be a spire?" Miss Priestman asked.

"A spire!" Hepworth's voice had its glad little lilt. "Our spire will be our crowning glory! On a clear day you will be able to see it—"

"From the roof of Selfridge's," Miss Priestman suggested.

"Or," amended Miss Burrows, "from the cross on the dome of St. Paul's."

Hepworth laughed. "Ah, that's better! We shall be seen from the dome of St. Paul's!" His delight was almost boyish. "But," he added, "the spire will be our one extravagance. The exterior will be very simple."

Miss Priestman's imagination contended with the impeding poles. "It will have the look, I suppose, of the ordinary Christian church."

"Yes, that has been our idea. We have no wish to appear absurd. And it's not always easy not to appear absurd. We have had the most preposterous suggestions. There

were people who wanted us to build a kind of Greek temple —some marvellous conception in marble. Perhaps the maddest of all came from a lady who wished us to build a mosque. Why a mosque I can't imagine. We don't keep our hats on at our Ethical services, and we certainly don't take off our boots—nor even put on slippers over them."

"And you hold out no promise of houris?"

"No," said Hepworth gravely, "we have no such radiant vision. The one point on which almost every one seemed to agree was that we ought to have a style of our own. As if a style in architecture could be evolved at a moment's notice! Before the things we stand for can be expressed in architecture, the whole nation will have to stand for them."

"I think some of our members," Miss Burrows remembered, "would have liked us to build a hall."

"I know! The old Rationalist loves his hall as Diogenes loved his tub. We have had far too much of halls already. We have had to use them, of course, because we could hold our services nowhere else. But the hall has been our great misfortune. You cannot create a religious atmosphere in a hall. It is essential to have a church. And if you have a church, you must have a Christian church."

"We are Christian," Miss Burrows said.

Miss Priestman looked at Hepworth. "*Are* you?" she asked.

Hepworth understood her challenge. "Isn't it too late to be anything else? We may change the form of our beliefs, but we cannot change our mentality."

Miss Priestman, whose observation of Hepworth was critical, felt that his real interests had at last been reached. There had been nothing forced or artificial, nothing of conscious effort, in the lightness of his tone hitherto; she recognised his genial side: but now his manner changed, and with the change—so she put it to herself—the "real" Hepworth came into view. This "real" Hepworth was never, she fancied, very far below the surface of the other. And for this reason she failed to respond to the other. She

certainly liked people to be real, but the " real " Hepworth, of whose reality the discourses, which Miss Burrows had taken her to hear, gave, she believed, the full measure, was a person against whom she felt a marked prompting to rebel.

" I should have thought," she said, " science had done something for us."

Hepworth's interest deepened. " It can't prevent our being modern."

" Prevent— ? "

" There's no putting back the clock. However near you may get to the spirit of another age, you can never go back to its mentality. You can never escape from the mentality of your own."

" But is our mentality exactly Christian ? "

Hepworth explained. " There are certainly persons," he said, " for whom Christian seems hardly the word. And I believe that even in these non-Christian persons religious needs persist. I am not suggesting that all religious mentality is Christian. But from the point of view of a Church, of *organised religion* that is, the only mentality to which you can appeal with any prospect of success is essentially Christian. In the popular sense of the word, we may speak of a religion of beauty, or a religion of truth, or a religion of patriotism, or a religion of social service. But in our age, with 2000 years of Christianity behind us, neither art, nor science, nor love of country, nor social reform, can be made the central purpose of a Church. Our religion must be large enough and human enough to provide for and encourage all these great idealisms ; but no one of them, taken alone, can be the central purpose of a Church. The religious values, which it is the special function of a Church to maintain, are essentially Christian values."

" Then why not leave it to the Christian Churches ? "

" Ah, it might be better if we could. My advice to people always is—Remain in your Church if you can. Development must come from within. But there are a multitude of people who find it impossible to remain."

"They can't accept the old dogmas?"

"They cannot accept the old supernaturalism."

"I see."

Miss Priestman was fond enough of discussion not to be very exacting as to the terms on which she took it: she did not mind the suggestion of a public utterance that now prevailed in Hepworth's tone. But these statements of his had a kind of sweep in them that made her anxious to keep her feet. "But aren't our values," she suggested, "our values in general, undergoing a certain amount of change?"

"Yes, and that is just why we need a Church."

"You think our values are being lowered?"

"I think that's where the danger lies. I think there is danger of our losing a perception of our deepest need."

"By that you mean?"

"Our need to be blessed rather than happy."

"Blessed?"

"At one with the things of the deepest experience we can know."

"Doesn't this sound rather mystical?"

"Would a religion, in which there was no element of mysticism, be a religion at all? It is the element of the mysterious that marks the difference between religion and morality."

Miss Priestman considered. "But hasn't psychology," she asked, "rather explained the mysterious away? You can't explain a mystery, and expect to keep it mysterious."

"No," Hepworth said, "the ultimate mysteries of existence can never be explained away. Psychology has shown that a recognition of the unexplained is a permanent factor of religious experience."

Miss Priestman gave her quick little laugh. "Anyhow, it's the practical things that count!"

"By practical you mean—"

"Well, social justice, better citizenship, better conditions all round!"

" Certainly, I agree that these things count. Righteousness in all human relations must always be our goal. But our religion must not address itself only to the social reformer in us. Even our social aspirations may betray us to cheapness, if we miss that final distinction—the difference between being happy and being blessed. And the mystic, you know, is often a very practical person."

" But you *are* a socialist," she objected.

Hepworth smiled. " Who isn't ? "

" Anyhow, you're a Rationalist ! "

" Oh yes, but I believe it is not natural for man to be without any form of organised religion—as so many men are to-day. We have needs moral, emotional, mystic, to which only a church can minister."

" They appear to be fairly weak in some of us."

" They always have been—in *some* of us."

Miss Priestman felt both a vague irritation at the confidence of Hepworth's tone, and a real desire to make him see a point which she believed to be quite worth seeing.

" But, surely, as a matter of fact," she insisted, " most people nowadays—most intelligent people, I mean—are not very much interested in churches ? We have such lots of other things to choose from : pictures, books, music, science —such lots of things to go in for. In the old days people had so few. Doesn't this mean that our religious needs have grown weaker ? "

Hepworth swept quietly on. " I don't think so at all," he said. " The needs are there just the same—they are ultimate facts of our nature : what we miss is the necessity for meeting them with any kind of organised worship. One form of idealism seems to us as good as another. So long as a man is an idealist, what does it matter what kind of idealist he is ? The artist is as good as the priest. Indeed, for many people it is the artist who is the priest of our day. It is he who interprets the mysteries. Now the point is this : behind our idealisms lie certain spiritual values. They are the presuppositions on which our idealisms rest. And if our values are to

be maintained, they must receive, not only recognition, but an avowed and public recognition, a recognition that can be effected only by a Church."

"It is the Church that guards the central flame," Miss Priestman suggested, "at which we light all our wandering torches?"

"Without the spiritual values for which a Church must stand," Hepworth said, "our idealisms would lose their finest quality."

"Yes, that may be," Miss Priestman admitted.

But that evening, a few hours later, when she and Miss Burrows were sitting quietly alone in their flat, she doubted whether she could honestly yield even this qualified measure of acquiescence.

III

Anne Burrows and Kate Priestman had lived together long enough to understand one another's pronouns. They were seldom in doubt as to the persons to whom these conveniences of speech referred. Though it must have been at least twenty minutes since Hepworth's name had been mentioned, and they had talked of other things in the interval, Anne had no need to dive for the reference when Kate, without warning, let drop,

"One feels he doesn't like women."

Anne, who was sitting near the summer grate in a wicker chair whose ungenial resistances were concealed by a cretonne cover, was altering a skirt which had hung too long in her cupboard. Anne gained very much by being seen without her hat. She did herself many injustices in the choice of the things she wore, and, especially, in the choice of hats. It was a gain not widely known, for beyond the small circle of Ethical friends who sometimes came to tea, few of the people she knew had ever seen her without one. First and last, there were many people she knew. She had come to know them through their speaking to her, and through her speaking to them, at the conclusion of meetings and lectures, and after services in those chapels and churches where the tolerant unbeliever feels more or less at home. This intercourse, casual and brief as it seemed, was far from being superficial. Strange depths of understanding were reached in the course of those few minutes' talk. The atmosphere of the meeting, its emotional appeal, the high note of idealism of the speaker, the general lifting of things to a higher level of human obligation and endeavour, made for the breaking down of conventional barriers, and rendered experiences easy to compare. Anne, of course, in

these public places, did not remove her hat, and it had occurred to few of her friends to consider how she would look without it. They met, for the most part, these women and Anne, like people who were going a round ; and in the case of people whom we see going a round—persons who are performing, for instance, the high social service of the policeman—we seldom allow our imaginations to play about their uncovered heads.

Anne uncovered was not quite Anne off duty—the tension was never quite relaxed ; but to be able to let her forehead, her hair, the shape of her head, her dark intelligent eyes with their look of kindly perception, prevail over the defects of her features, was to discover a face from which the charm of a fineness had banished more commonplace qualities. The high purposes of a larger world were seldom far from Anne's thoughts ; but the irreverent male, who had seen her quietly at home, quietly at work, with all the dust of public places brushed off, might have indulged an irreverent wonder as to why Anne had not married.

" He always supported the Suffrage Movement," Anne said.

" Oh yes, of course, he would. But you know what I mean."

Anne pulled out a pin. " I am not quite sure that I do."

Kate was sitting near an open window. She looked out at the big trees beyond the high line of black tarred fence that enclosed the Walk on the further side. They were trees in the grounds of an old house—the old house itself was not visible—that had helped to make Hampstead history. The sitting-room was on the first floor, and its windows were much above the level of the fence ; but for Kate, through the leafy screen of the trees, the grounds showed as no more than a place of a tangled wildness. The house had been long unoccupied. The Walk was a passage used chiefly by persons on foot, though it possessed a tarred roadway with a strip of pavement under the fence ; the houses, that faced the fence, had scraps of untidy garden with iron railings

and gates. They were small houses of worn red brick, a bit of an older Hampstead.

" Nothing one says makes any impression on him."

Anne did not look up. " Why should one expect to impress him ? "

Kate gave her quick little laugh. " No, I don't suppose one should. But it's irritating to feel you're not being listened to."

Anne considered. There was something in the largeness of her person that seemed to make the restfulness of her decisions deeper. You felt, as you looked at her, that the reserves of conviction on which she drew were likely to be quiet depths. " I think you would find, if you knew him better, that he listens more than you suppose. One often discovers afterwards that he has remembered something one has said."

Kate looked down at a strolling couple who were passing the railings beneath the window, and whose footsteps sounded loud in the restricted space of the passage. " I admit he lets you say what you think. You are not obliged to agree with him."

" Yes. He is very tolerant."

" But, then, that's because he doesn't care."

" His manner is the same with men," Anne said.

" I know ! But it wouldn't be, if he liked us better ! "

Anne's work went quietly on. " Doesn't one prefer to be treated like that ? "

" One might—if he really respected us."

" He does—as human beings."

Kate's forbearance broke down. " Oh, I know ! He takes us all in the lump. Individuals hardly exist for him."

Anne smiled as she quietly sewed. " Isn't this the first time you have spoken to him ? "

It was a gentle, very good-tempered little check, and Kate, who was fond of discussion, would scarcely have taken it as a check, certainly would not have resented it, if she had not looked at Anne's bowed head, and then at Anne's

busy fingers. She was not jealous of Anne's efficiencies. Anne's sewing was much better than hers, as Anne's cooking was better than hers—very much better indeed. Anne had begun life in a kitchen, where she had often cooked as well as eaten her dinner. Kate had fried her first sausage over the sitting-room fire of her lodgings. Even now, when she could command the convenient gas rings of their cooker, she could never tell when things had to be turned. She acquiesced in Anne's superior efficiencies as she had once acquiesced in her mother's. But the sight of Anne's work reminded her of certain little odd jobs of her own, by her neglect of which she was as much annoyed as by the thought of having to do them. The touch of irritation with which she observed Anne's fingers affected her perception of what Anne said. The large quiet of her figure appeared a little too quiet and large. It seemed to her that Anne should be opposed.

" He is friendly and pleasant," she said, " and I am not surprised that some people like him very much : but, for me, he has not a sympathetic personality. It's the same with his speaking. He is a splendid speaker, of course—one of the best I have ever heard :—but he does not win you."

A little colour stole into Anne's cheek. " I know," she said, " that is how many people feel. They say he always interests them, but they seldom agree. I think this is partly because he is so many-sided, and partly because he is not emotional enough."

" Emotional ! He's about as emotional as he very well can be ! "

" Yes—his manner, of course, is emotional. That is why he speaks so well. But his message is essentially a message for men. He is an idealist—but he is never in the least sentimental. He has a horror of sentimentality. He is not the kind of preacher to make women run after him. Women of that sort don't want to be made to think."

Kate felt the justice of this. She herself always wanted to be made to think. She had an habitual sense of the great

importance of thinking. Anne and she would not have lived so comfortably together if they had not shared this ultimate conviction. On the other hand, as was not unnatural, there were certain differences between them. Kate—metaphorically—took more times off, more " evenings out," permitted herself more little flings of the spirit : she had a more ironic sense of the drama of life, and needed more comic relief. It was she who read the novels, it was she who chose their occasional play. In people she often saw things that Anne would miss, and her interpretation of motive was always the more discriminating. She was inclined to elude Anne's judgment when it came to selecting a hat. In the matter of shapes her taste was rather more venturesome. She had not Anne's perseverance in well doing, and there were evenings when she would have liked to leave the washing-up. If in fact she did not leave it, it was because to leave things only meant their being done by Anne ; and you could not impose on a person who showed herself so willing.

In many little matters she had helped Anne to move on. She was not conscious of the ascetism of Anne's wicker chair, not being much given to taking her ease, but she had induced Anne to honour *The Soul's Awakening*, bought before they had come together, with a good place in Anne's bedroom. It was she, and not Anne, who had chosen their Japanese matting ; but Anne's natural gravitation towards the minor products of Japanese art needed constant watching and care. The lace curtains had gone from the windows, and the aspidistras in their large yellow pots had gone too, and the teazels and grasses, with the vases they filled, had disappeared from the chimneypiece. Gone was the beautifully painted bright green drain pipe that had once stood in a corner. These eliminations effected, Kate felt that their sitting-room, with the pleasantness of its two windows, the reproductions of Old Masters on the walls, the nice old chest of drawers that had not too many things on it, had now no suggestion of that kind of lodging house sitting-room of which in her time she had seen so much, but possessed

the lightness and the personal note to which in a flat one was free to attain. For a final stroke, she would have liked to have their table moved to the wall, but to this central convenience Anne clung rather pathetically : and, as the room was the scene of their meals, here perhaps Anne was right. Fortunately, the table was not very large.

These little differences, however, stood for no more than the surface adjustments of an existence lived by two women in common : affection apart (Anne's lovableness was a thing she couldn't now have done without), they were united on the great main point of a high seriousness in the taking of life, and a sincerity in approaching its problems. And yet as she looked down once more over the long straight line of tarred fence into the obscure shadows beneath the trees, shadows that the gradual twilight had begun to make more obscure, she perceived, as she thought of what Anne had said, a difference not superficial. She saw it in the paradox of Anne's defence of Hepworth. His virile teaching did appeal, beyond doubt, to Anne's honest clear strong head ; but it was not with Anne, as she believed it was with herself, reason that got the last word. What got the last word with Anne was emotion ! She seemed to be one of those persons who really do need that kind of religion for which—apparently—you must have some sort of church. She was not a person who would ever " run after " any one ; but to the preacher, who could meet both the claims of her intelligence and her emotional needs, she would give a very loyal devotion. She herself was not like that. To the end she must remain detached and critical. . . .

She let her silence lengthen. There stole over her, with a curious, almost unconscious shifting of her mood, a sense of things as old. In the shadowy mutations of the dusk the quiet of the empty walk gained an effect of depth :—and deep things were somehow old. Her impressions of the moment and her thought of Anne wove themselves into a single texture. The elements in Anne's being which she did not share had a look of things both old and deep. How far

could one afford to be deficient in, how far to be without, things so old as these? Had not the perceptions of people like Anne the value of a peculiar quality? Was not this pretty much what Hepworth had meant? She thought no more of the paradox of Anne's defence of him: rather she saw between them an intimate tie of resemblance.

She looked once more at Anne.

"Can you see over there?" she asked. "Shall I turn on the light?"

"I can see a little longer," Anne said. "I think I shall go to bed very soon. I am tired."

"One usually is," Kate said, "on Saturday night."

She let her weaving thoughts weave on. A man, who was passing under the fence, reminded her, by the way he carried his stick, of the lamplighter who used to swing his brass-tipped pole of office in much the same kind of way, when, in the distant days before street lamps were obscured, he passed on his round at this hour. His prosaic figure had had a touch of incongruous romance.

"I have not seen Mrs. Hepworth lately," she said.

Anne tried to remember. "No: I have not seen her for the last Sunday or two. I think Mr. Hepworth told some one she was going to stay with relations in the country."

Kate was still looking at Anne. "Don't you always feel she is just the kind of woman he was sure to marry?"

"My dear Kate!"

"He would never have married his intellectual equal."

Anne's work dropped to her lap. "But you don't know either of them!" she gasped.

Kate gave her quick little laugh. "I know what you have told me."

"But I don't know them either—not in that way, I mean. I don't go to their house."

"There's no need to. You can tell what Mrs. Hepworth's like by looking at her."

Anne took up her work:—but began to put it away. "I can't see any more," she said. "It goes dark quite suddenly.

I have always found Mrs. Hepworth very nice," she added.

" Yes—her class *is* . . . when it's not the opposite ! "

" She is always quite unaffected and simple. And she's always most willing to help."

" But she doesn't seem in the picture. She has some rather grand relations, hasn't she ? "

" Yes : I believe her family are people of position. Mrs. Hathaway, who speaks for us sometimes, is her aunt."

" That's it. One feels that's the kind of thing he wanted."

Anne smiled at last. " I think," she said, " it is time we went to bed. You are becoming too subtle."

Kate rose from her chair.

She looked out once more at the deepening trees, and once more the shadows and the quiet and her sense of the place as old helped her to a kind of measure : she saw the underworld of emotional experience, to which people like Anne, and people like Hepworth, made their returns and descents, as a place of much possible value.

" It is as I say," she reflected : " he doesn't really respect us."

" I am going to bed," Anne said.

" A man like that ought not to want just the obvious things."

Anne's commonsense had, in its quiet way, almost an effect of humour.

" Poor Mrs. Hepworth ! " she sighed.

IV

This same Saturday evening, while the light in his garden was still clear and warm—a little, that is, before Anne Burrows had settled to the altering of her skirt, and Susan had begun to reflect on aunt Jane—Hepworth sat alone in the quiet of his library, preparing his Discourse for the morrow.

The room was expressive of his many sides. It was the room of a man of means and a man of taste, a place of work and of comfort. The chair in which Hepworth was sitting was not the only chair that offered depth and ease for meditation. The wall that ran from the door to the window was hidden behind long high rows of books. They were nearly all English or German books, and were, for the most part, modern : books that dealt with the problems of contemporary issues, or the results of recent speculation and research : the row of the psychologists—especially the psychologists of the American school—was one of the longest rows. But there was a seasoning of poems and plays, the set of Bernard Shaw's volumes being almost complete. There were no rare books, and no books whose bindings were rare. All were books for use.

The fireplace opposite the bookshelves was a reproduction of ancient work that one of his artist friends had discovered in an old house near Caudebec. It was medieval and deep, admirably proportioned to the room, with a canopy that reached almost to the ceiling. The pictures, predominantly portraits, suggested the range of his human and intellectual sympathies. Mazzini and Moltke were friendly neighbours ; Ibsen, George Eliot, and Saint Teresa were in the company of Cavour and Professor Weismann. There were photographs of two or three of his

personal friends near by. On a cabinet, whose drawers contained a card index, stood a bust of Savonarola, and above hung a water colour drawing of the rock garden at Hepworth's old home in the North. Within reach of the warmth of the fire (when there was one) was a table so massive and spacious, so amply provided with drawers, so well equipped for the needs of the business man, that it suggested the convenience of an office. It was here that the letters and papers of his public life were scattered, and a telephone looked down on the blotting-pad. A small typewriter, on a brass tripod, stood near the revolving chair in front of these useful dispositions.

The notes of his Discourse for the morrow lay on a table close to his chair. On this table were ornaments, things of value, genuine objects of art : two little nutmeg-graters of the time of Charles II ; a viatorium of a strange design ; a Limoges crucifix with a copper gilt Christ on an enamelled cross, a work of the 13th century.

Hepworth faced an open window, and the grass of his garden was only a few feet from him. A trim slope of lawn, well-mown, with well-clipped edges, had for its one distinctive feature a fine bird bath of marble. On Hepworth's right a pergola was crimson with roses. Below the garden was the vacant field in which the church was building. The length of the nave could not be seen, for the hillside made an angle, but the scaffolding of the west end was discernible beyond and behind the side branches of the elm at the top of the field. And still further below, beyond an irregular vagueness of roofs, lay the vast misty presence of London.

It was as a presence that he was aware of it. He had a sense of London's being there as he might have had the sense of another person's being in the room. But the great presence in the mist meant more to him than any individual could have meant. From the uniform purple greyness of the evening light a few detached objects stood out—a church spire, a factory chimney, the long roof of some public hall, the uncouth stack of a power station, the dim ringed

speck, to which, in the distance, the frame of a gasometer had dwindled. He did not notice these things—he was too familiar with them ; but the scene itself was a magnet that drew and directed, with hidden persistence, the shifting movements of his mind. It gave a guiding thought to his thinking—the sense of a purpose that must underlie, like a connecting thread, the diversity of his various conclusions. Romantic evocations were not to his taste, and even if he had been less familiar with his evening view, he would not have let his fancy play with it ; he would have had no vision, accusing or otherwise, of the drama of contrasted scenes ; he would not have pictured the traffic of wanton night pleasure in thoroughfares where the shops were closed, nor heard the noisy stalls in the littered side streets where women jostled and marketed. Nevertheless, the city, though neither imagined nor perceived, was never far below the surface of his consciousness. And its significance was always human. It was a London, realised in terms of humanity, that provided the subtle reference for his thinking.

Intimately—more intimately than in the mere fact of his solitude at the moment—he was alone with this London. He was alone with it by virtue of what he believed he could give it, of the uniqueness of his perception of its need. But nearer presences were with him, presences here in this room itself, influences so potent and so penetrating that his own mind was, in a sense, no more than a product of them. On the shelves above him were the works of the masters and builders, the layers of the chief corner stones of the temple of contemporary thought. In this temple he was a devout and constant worshipper. The reinterpretations and discoveries of the thinkers on the shelves made the atmosphere and inspiration of the room. They, too, like the visible presence of the city, provided a reference for his thinking. They stood for that modern mind with which his own was so deeply in accord. It was neither the scholar nor the man of letters in him that responded to their high appeal ; it was that he believed that a religion which would meet the

needs of our changing world must have philosophy and science to support it. The modern Saul, who desired to be among the prophets, must be also among the philosophers. He had not prepared himself for his mission by retirement to a spiritual Thebaid, but by a few hard years at a German university. More especially, the modern Saul must be among the religious psychologists. Just above him were those of the American school—Coe, Leuba, Starbuck, William James, and the rest ; beside them stood the great work of Durkheim, and all the volumes of *The Golden Bough*. They seemed to him, between them, the explorers in these various fields, to have given a lead, pointed a new direction, offered reinterpretations of old experiences, made reconstruction possible. They had penetrated behind the rites and practices, the myths and magic and dark gods, of ancient and of primitive peoples, behind the conversion of adolescence, the illumination of the mystic, the inward witness of ecstasy and prayer ; and had discovered those abiding needs of human nature, to which the religions of the past, through all the strange conflict of their manifestations, had in truth never failed to minister. To try to provide for these abiding needs the new ministrations which our age required was the task of his own high purpose.

But before him in the deepening mist lay the dim presence of the city, and, for all the companionship of these kindred spirits, he knew that he was alone with it.

He had a deep desire to build. He was not content merely to speculate. He was not of those thinkers who, having taken religion into the laboratory, are willing to let it stay there. The psychology of religion was one thing, and religion, as he would point out, another. He desired to embody his discoveries in a living organisation, to express them in a visible church. He desired to re-awaken in those who had lost it a sense of the importance of worship. And the magnitude of his task was immense. The trend of popular sympathies and popular interests was a force arrayed against him. Even the people, whose plea for religion was the most enlightened.

were deaf to his plea for a church. They were not only sceptical of his success, they were hostile to his intention. Certainly, he had his following. He had his Society, he had the hall in which his services were now being held, the church in which he hoped one day to hold them. His congregation on the morrow would consist of some two or three hundred persons, the total membership of the Society rising to nearly twice that number. He was well-known among men whose work lay in other fields, and he often appeared on political platforms. He touched life at innumerable points. But, in essence, the conception of his mission was prophetic. Behind his advocacy of countless reforms and good causes lay a call, very old and devout, to the inspiration of prayer and worship. On the table by his chair stood an emblem of religious experience, the significance of which, as he sometimes thought, some psychologists of religion had missed. He knew that the Christ on the strange enamelled cross at his side was a Christ who was not dead. Among the many counsels of the room Hepworth's ear still heard his voice.

But though he did suffer sometimes from the loneliness of the furrow he ploughed, he was not very often discouraged. He had faith in his message, faith in himself, and he was full of the joy of battle. He had a sense of the city as a place to be conquered as well as a place to be saved. His commonsense expected no easy triumph, and even if the walls did not fall down, he could enjoy the music of his trumpet. He was aware of certain incongruities to which his worldly position committed him. A prophet with private means as ample as his was hardly in the line of the true succession. A well-appointed establishment in a well-favoured suburb was an unexpected residence for a seer. But he recognised both himself and the world as modern, and the message, he believed, was of more importance than the mantle. He did not think that the value of what he had to say would be appreciably increased by the uncouthness of the garments he wore, nor even that his insight would be sensibly deepened by a diet of locusts and wild honey.

To adopt, however, the methods of the modern world is to be exposed to its special temptations. From affectation, in the form of asceticism, his genial virility was immune ; but against excesses of self-expression, in the form of advertisement, his defences were less secure. By temperament, by conviction, by the tradition of his family, he was tempted to let himself go. He was too human and much too alive not to feel the exhilaration of publicity. The interview and the paragraph called to him, he was not unaware of the poster. He knew how much the shepherd, who would gather the sheep into the right fold, was helped by the barking of dogs. He desired all men to hear, and would not—in theory at least—have despised the megaphone, if by its means he could have moved the multitude. He had a robust liking for a crowd. If he had wept over the city, it would not have been as he saw it from his neighbouring heath even on an August Bank Holiday. From childhood, moreover, he had been schooled to the uses of advertisement. So long as he could remember, the recommendations of the Hepworth engine—simple, dignified, reticent, uniform repetitions of the emblematic trade mark of the firm—had given a curious little intimate homelike touch, a little odd sense of possession, to the most public and frequented scenes.

All the same, Hepworth remained unadvertised. Valuable as advertisement might be as a form of self-expression, he felt it to be defective as a means of grace. His private taste was fastidious. He could not do the things—the absurd and often very vulgar things—that brought other men into notice. In principle he respected the gallery, but in practice he could never play to it. He could play only to the intelligent, though he knew that with every appeal to the intelligence the circle of your public was narrowed.

Perhaps, after all, he did not know : his faith in intelligence was profound, and with the average in human nature he was more than a little out of touch. A shrewder propagandist would not have disregarded, as he did, the appeal of

the romantic and the picturesque. He would have seen that though the mantle will not make the message, it may go some way towards making the prophet. He had reckoned without his host, and, what was worse it may be, he had reckoned without his hostess. He could not rely, as had so many idealists before him, on the helpful appreciation of women. He had a fine figure and a fine head, and there was a buoyancy in the freedom of his talk ; but the imagination, that is stirred by the temptations of Saint Anthony in the desert, may not respond with much vividness to the austerities of a German university. He had not endeared himself to the drawing-room by the most platonic suggestion of romance. And many women like a man to be at least a potential lover. It was on his own terms, without compromise of either the dignity or the integrity of his message, that the city must be content to take him.

V

Hepworth, for a man who was impatient by nature, was tolerant of domestic interruption. He gave life's smaller claims their place, and the hold of his thought was so tenacious that he could break the thread without much danger of losing it.

When, presently, the maid came to him with the name of a visitor, whom she said she had left in the drawing-room, his only emotion was surprise. It was surprise, however, that a slight touch of apprehension quickened. He went to the drawing-room at once.

In the middle of the room, that looked a little forlorn in its temporary disuse, stood, where the maid had left him, a young man in officer's khaki. Hepworth's relief as well as his surprise showed in the turn of his greeting.

"Bertie ! ! " he exclaimed. "It's *you* ! "

The young man took it in. "You were expecting George ? "

"No," Hepworth explained, "but Fanny said '*Mr.* Bousfield,' and I thought it must be your brother. I imagined nothing so splendid as seeing you ! "

The young man laughed. "I would have wired if I had not been so awfully rushed."

"So long as we've got you ! " Hepworth said. "But how did you manage it ? Nowadays men can't be spared very easily, can they ? Not wounded ? You look splendidly fit."

"I am not, you know. I've got the most beastly rheumatism. But it was not that that did it. Our colonel is a sort of connection of ours—a cousin of Rose's or something. Urgent family business," he added, with an expression that Hepworth did not see.

"You have been having terrible times ? "

" Yes, it's been a bit thick," Bertie said.

" But Susan ? She will never forgive herself for not being here to meet you."

" Sue's away ? " The look of the room had prepared him for his sister's absence.

" Yes, she is staying with George at Hildon. That is why I was alarmed when Fanny said ' *Mr.* Bousfield.' I thought something terrible had happened down there, and that George had come to tell me. Our nerves have grown rather jumpy."

" Air raids and things," Bertie suggested.

" All that has happened in the last four years. You will go down to Hildon ? "

The look, which Hepworth had not seen, returned to Bertie's face. " I've only got till to-morrow night," he said.

Hepworth held back for a moment or two. He detected something a little evasive, or at least a little unaccountable, in the tone of Bertie's voice. But he abstained from using his impression.

" Anyhow, for to-night," he went on, genially, " you trust yourself to me. I expect the first thing you want is supper."

Bertie shook his head. " Thanks very much. The first thing I want is a bath."

Hepworth laughed. " Of course ! That shows what an outsider I am ! I am not used to returning heroes, and don't know what to do when I get them. Well, if you will wait here a minute or two, I will tell Fanny to get things ready for you."

Hepworth went into the hall.

The young man remained where Hepworth left him. He was a young man of twenty-six, sunburnt, fair like George but of slighter build, with the same slight forward bend of the head, and a Charlie Chaplin moustache. The look that the mention of Hildon had brought to his face came back to it, and it was a look that would account very well for an indifference

to bodily movement. It was as if, as he gazed at the carpet, the awkwardness of a position, of whose awkwardness he imagined he had taken the measure, had been still more fully revealed to him. It was as if, behind him, some moral door had closed. He did move to the window, however, and looked at the pleasant view, but neither the lawn with its bird bath, nor the pergola with its roses, could do more for his comfort than the flowers in the pattern of the carpet. He turned away, and, at the sound of Hepworth's voice in the hall, said, just audibly, " Damn."

Hepworth came back. " If you will come now," he said. " You are to have the room you had when you stayed with us last, and Fanny will have put it straight for you by the time you have had your bath. The house is in a melancholy state," he added. " All the maids have left us—except Fanny and the cook. Susan and I live the simple life, and live it in its full simplicity. You will find a crust, however—I hope it is not our last !—in the dining-room when you come down." And Hepworth, with a kindly and genial regard for his comfort, took the young man upstairs.

VI

The light in the garden was growing dim. In the open space of the lawn the bird bath, discoloured by daylight, had recovered a whiteness against the darkening carpet of the grass. The loose branches of the pergola had gathered the shadows into a soft and velvety blackness. Beyond the wall, with which the lawn and the pergola ended, lay nothing more than the gloom of the summer dusk, but the sky still kept a lingering clearness, and there was the clear-cut crescent of a moon. The big elm, in the field where the church was building, still stood out, a last loiterer from the world of day. The city had quite disappeared.

Hepworth, again in his chair by the window, saw the moon as Susan too at that moment saw it, and his mind, like Susan's, was burdened with a nearer claim. He had just listened to disclosures by which he had been very deeply shocked. Bertie, from whom his distress had come, sat by his side in a chair to make room for which Hepworth had pushed his own a little nearer to the bookshelves. On the table on Bertie's left stood his coffee cup, and beside it was an ash-tray of which, for some time, he had made a nervous and too frequent use. His chair was as deep as Hepworth's, and to reach the ash-tray he had been obliged to twist round on his elbow and lean awkwardly across the left arm. His nervousness had been betrayed by these movements : it was as if they had helped him to turn the more awkward corners of his narrative. The first of these corners, however, had now been safely turned, and Bertie felt not only the relief that usually comes when the cost of the first step has been paid, but even the beginning of a return to his self-possession. He had gained a certain advantage by the very impression he had made. There was

little in Bertie to suggest the hardened sinner ; he acknowledged that the position in which he found himself was not very much to his credit ; John's deep disapproval was justified. But Bertie believed that to keep one's head was always the most important thing to do, and his brother-in-law had not altogether kept his. He had taken the thing just a little harder than he need. Experience of a certain kind—a kind it was obvious that John had not had—was required for a judgment in a case like this. Bertie felt his own head grow cooler, and a cool head is a less difficult head to lift. If he was not yet able to look up—to look John fairly in the face, he did begin to feel able to shake off a first few of his repentant ashes. Had he liked and respected John less, he would have known much less compunction.

Bertie resembled his brother. Though, like George, he had never committed himself to the exactions of the intellectual life, he had something of George's curiosity ; he respected—other things being favourable—any man whom he spotted as " good," and, like George, he believed that he himself was rather good at this sort of spotting. If his brother-in-law had been an Oxford man (Bertie had come down a few weeks before the War broke out), he would, Bertie conjectured, probably have been a don. And in John's case other things were decidedly favourable. He looked clean and fit and there was plenty of him, and he did both himself and you very well. He wore the right kind of collar and tie. You did not necessarily like a man because he wore the right kind of collar and tie, but there was always a certain amount of lee-way to make up if he didn't. It was odd how men of John's age put you off by little wrong things in clothes. As for the way in which he did *you*, the bath Bertie had taken, and the supper he had enjoyed, and the cigar of whose ash he had been too careful, and the armchair whose ease he had begun to appreciate, were evidence enough to go on with. On other leaves there had been stalls at the theatre, preceded by bright expensive little dinners. John knew the right places to go to. If,

moreover, he betrayed some want of experience in taking the thing too hard, wasn't it in the main because he was too jolly straight? Here was a point that he had to make John see: his misadventure did not involve, thank the Lord! any real lapse from straightness.

"When was it born?" Hepworth asked.

"A fortnight ago."

"You have not spoken of marrying her."

Bertie paused for the best way of putting it.

"Oh, it was not like that, you know."

"Like what?"

"Well, I expect you see it as more romantic than it was."

"Romantic! I think it was terrible!"

"Yes, of course. I am not precisely proud of it. But it does no good to take the thing too tragically."

"But it is tragic," Hepworth insisted. "How old is she?"

"I don't know exactly. I think about twenty-two."

"Twenty-two! And you have spoilt her life!"

Bertie looked out over the dusky lawn. The emotion in Hepworth's voice brought home to him the importance of keeping cool himself. "I don't think that's how she really feels about it. She's awfully game."

"You mean—she doesn't reproach you?"

"Oh no, there have been no reproaches in her letters. She knew the risk she was taking—and took it. She doesn't blame me especially."

"She must have been very fond of you."

"Well. . . ."

Once more Bertie leaned across the left arm of his chair, but, this time, he let the ash drop deliberately. To make the affair intelligible, to be realistic, so to speak, without being too cynical—and he did not feel at all cynical, seemed almost beyond the power of even the coolest of heads. In a sense, indeed, the more he recovered his self-possession, the more difficult explanations grew, for the

more the nervousness, with which he had approached the interview, wore away, the more his surroundings began to tell on him. He, too, before the War, had been accustomed to a seemly and even to a dignified existence. There had been Hildon Place, and there had been his life at Oxford. At Oxford, his rooms, just by his preference for the old, a preference he shared with George, had shown a taste that he himself had considered " pretty decent," and which in fact had not been the taste of most of the men of his set. Now, over and above the sense of physical well-being induced by his bath and his supper, the cigar and the depth of his chair, he experienced a genuine response to the impressions he received from the room : its order and comfort, its dignity and repose, its look of immense security. He saw the books, and respected the man who had read them : he was interested in the small strange crucifix that caught his eye each time his ash dropped in the ash-tray. And it came over him that between the life of the man who lived in this room and the life he himself had been living only a few hours ago, there was the difference between lives lived on far distant planets.

" It is rather hard to explain," he said, " if you don't know that sort of life."

Hepworth waited. On him, too, lay the strangeness of an enormous difference. But, for him, it was not quite the difference between the worlds of peace and war. He had more shrewdness, more worldly wisdom, than Bertie had yet perceived, and he had also more imagination. The Puritan in him suffered, for the Puritan influences of his boyhood—influences too much in accord with his own nature for him to have felt their limitations at the time—were deep in his being still ; but with a wider knowledge of the world had come an increased tolerance and comprehension. He had imagination enough to include consideration for the girl in the concern he felt for Bertie. The strangeness, of which he was most aware, was that of the young man himself. He stood for differences of race,

differences of sphere, differences of moral tradition. His looks, his voice, his manner, his degree of diffidence and his degree of ease, his reasonableness and detachment, his compunction and apology, the cynicism of which he was only half conscious, his reference always to a social standard and never to a moral code—to such points of difference he had gained a peculiar sensitiveness through the intimate experiences of his marriage. It was difficult in any way to associate Susan with such an incident as this, and yet Bertie reminded him of her. They were united in his thought, in a subtle way, by the bond of their difference from himself.

"It is the sort of life," he said, rather grimly, "in which you lose all moral values."

"Probably—if you choose to put it that way. What really happens, I think, is that you get light-hearted—or feel you want to be. It's the reaction, of course. It's so utterly beastly out there that you go to the opposite extreme as soon as you get the chance. Besides, that kind of thing is going on all the time."

"Not out there?"

"Not actually out there, of course. At home, I mean. Everywhere. Every one gets demoralised."

"I should have thought every one would have been inspired. . . . To fight for so great a cause. . . ."

"I dare say. . . . It looks rather as if it ought to be like that. But that's not how the thing works out."

"And the girls? Do they get demoralised, too?"

"Not all, certainly. I imagine most of them come through all right. They are different. But it's a queer life for them, too. And some of them do seem to get a bit like us."

"What you call 'light-hearted'?"

"Well, look at the risks they run! Elsie—her name is Elsie—had several precious near goes. She *was* hit once. She did motoring, you know. She was supposed to have a fairly safe job, but . . . well, mistakes get made. That's how it was the time when she got hit. The road they sent her down would have been all right . . . if it hadn't turned

in the wrong direction ! She stuck to it, and was landed in a very warm spot. The car was blown to bits—her escape was simply marvellous ! I know, because I happened to be there myself. Things like that are not good for any one's nerves. It doesn't seem to me surprising if girls, who have seen the things we have, feel the reaction as we do."

" And get light-hearted ? "

" Yes, more or less. Don't mind taking other risks, you know. Anyhow, don't think so much about them as the girls who stay at home. But I don't say this is true of most of them. I don't believe it is."

" It's terrible," Hepworth said.

" Well, if you will have war. . . . Beastly dirty work like this is not likely to turn us into saints. You can't blame the women, either. The whole thing's utterly rotten. In such an utterly rotten world who cares a damn for morals ! Oh, I am sorry. I know you are interested in morals. But it is rotten. . . . And oh, my God ! I am sick of it ! "

The dusk on the lawn had grown deeper. The further wall had faded to a line of blackness cutting the moon-lit gloom. On the still air the throb of the city's unquiet night laid a murmur of distant sound. The echo of footsteps on the pavement came now and then from the road.

This time, it was the patriot in Hepworth that suffered : this lifting of the curtain hurt the idealism with which every cause he espoused was invested. The War was for him still, as it had been at the first, a war of ideal aims ; he saw in President Wilson the greatest figure on the world's stage at that moment. He had a deep faith in the value of fighting, and among some of his followers in London, among some of his own people in the North (his mother was of Quaker origin), among some of the leaders of the political movements with which he had been united before the War, he had found tendencies to pacificism by his denunciation of which he had incurred considerable animosity. Bertie's disillusionment, bitter and brutal, was a disclosure from which he shrank. But he knew what it had

cost the young man to make it, and he knew when to stay his hand. Sensitive himself, he had a delicate touch for deep wounds. He felt it was a moment for trying, just simply, to say something that Bertie would like.

"Elsie must be a brave girl," he said.

Bertie brightened. "I think myself she's splendid."

Hepworth's tone was now quite gentle. "But you have not asked her to marry you."

"It would be no good. She doesn't want to."

"After what has happened?"

Bertie, in his cool quick way, saw Hepworth's drift. "Lost her respect for me, you mean?—that sort of thing?"

"She might be too proud."

"No, it's not like that—at least I don't think it is. She was never really in love with me. As a matter of fact I knew her before we met out there, but it began when we were in France. We were thrown together a good deal. I had to use a car, and it was she who did the driving. We met again the last time I was home on leave. And . . . well, the thing just happened. She had not been back very long herself. We were both feeling a bit irresponsible."

Hepworth now had no desire but to help: if he probed still, it was only to understand better. "But the child?"

"Yes, that's the worst of it."

"You feel, don't you, that you owe something to the child?"

"Feel it!—I feel it most tremendously! It's been most horribly on my mind. To think that one might get knocked out any day before one had had time to put the thing right! That's why I am here this evening. I want to see our family lawyer. As a matter of fact, I telephoned from Victoria just now, and he said he would see me to-morrow morning. At his own house, you know. To-morrow's Sunday."

Hepworth was impressed. This was a turn for which he had not allowed. The position had changed. His own standing in the case had changed.

Bertie placed in the ash-tray the end of the finished cigar. "It is fortunate," he said, "that I have something to leave. Mother's money, as you know, of course, came to Sue and me. There was a doubtful point, I believe, when the thing was settled years ago, and George was rather decent about it."

Hepworth felt his sense of a change grow deeper.

"So the child will be taken care of," he reflected. "Is it a boy or a girl?"

"A girl."

Bertie let a moment or two go by. "I don't pretend it's satisfactory," he said. "A thing like this can't be. But if I do come back in the end—I don't think myself it's likely—I shall look after her as far as I can. She won't have a worse handicap than I can help. On the other hand, of course, it's a bit of a handicap for me. I am not a millionaire."

"And are you going to take care of Elsie?"

"I would if she needed it. I have seen that she has been all right since she has had to give up work."

"I suspect she *is* rather proud," Hepworth said.

"There is no doubt she is immensely plucky. You should see her letters! I don't think she will let me do much for her. She is used to taking care of herself. There are several things she could do. She would like to go on motoring. She might get a place as a gentleman's chauffeuse. Early in the War she went into a factory at Nottingham, but found the work rather horrid, and learnt to drive. Before the War she was in a shop. So you see she is pretty versatile."

"She was in a shop?" Hepworth had not foreseen the shop.

Bertie quite understood. "No: she's not a lady. I dare say you wouldn't like her manners. But she's made of jolly good stuff!"

Hepworth smiled. He liked the way Bertie said it. "Yes: she must be, I think."

But he marvelled. It seemed to him that the young man grew stranger, moved further and further from the world of

his own experience, almost with each thing he said. And in spite of his natural kindness, his desire to do all he could, Hepworth felt a deep distaste. He recognised Bertie's good points and tried to do justice to them, but he belonged to an alien and unintelligible type. The aspects of human nature, which Bertie's case made vivid, caused him a grave discouragement. The genial idea that it takes all sorts to make a world was one from which he could derive no manner of comfort. He would have preferred a world of selected types. There was in him something deep and instinctive which Bertie—for all his good points—offended.

He moved in his chair, turning towards the shadowy shelves. The psychologists up there, those explorers of human experience. . . . He failed for once in his response to these kindred spirits. What precisely, he found himself wondering, could the science of the human mind do for you when you came to close quarters with a Bertie? . . . But this was an unprofitable line. . . . After all, what Bertie stood for was not the strangeness of the human mind, but the strange mind of the Bousfield family. It all turned upon that. It all came back to that. How Susan would have taken Bertie's adventure he did not know, but he did know that Bertie was Susan's brother. Bertie was not unintelligible to Susan. And Susan was not unintelligible. . . .

Suddenly, he tired of the dusk. A need for movement came over him, a need to exchange these meditations, with their curious blending of discouragement and irritation, for some form of physical activity. Above all, he needed light. The sentimental vagueness of the dusk had no kind of attraction for him.

He rose from his chair.

"I am going to light up," he said. "But we must draw the curtains first. This window is very conspicuous."

"Special constables?" Bertie suggested.

Hepworth drew the curtains across the window, and as the darkness of the room was absolute, he struck a match; the switches were beside the door at the further end, and to

reach them, in so long a room, would not have been easy in the dark. He turned on the lights that hung from the wall on each side of the canopy above the fireplace. Then he came to his big business table, and sat down in the revolving chair. He lighted the portable lamp that stood behind the telephone at a little distance from the blotting-pad. The strong light on his papers pleased him. He found it pleasant to look for a letter, of which in fact he had no particular need ; in fingering the normal familiar things on his table he gained a sense of recovered strength.

Bertie, standing with his back to the empty grate, watched his brother-in-law as he turned the papers. It occurred to him that John was a powerful figure of a man. The lamps on the wall were shaded ; the light of the reading lamp fell only on John's wrists and hands ; but his body, it seemed to Bertie, loomed very large in the shadow.

" Aren't you rather wondering," he asked, " why I have told you all this ? "

Hepworth smiled. " So many people have told me things at one time and another."

Bertie thought this not at all unlikely.

" There *is* one thing I can do for her."

" And I can help you to do it ? "

" I am so awfully rushed, you see. I could have done it myself if they had given me another day. I absolutely haven't time ! "

" Let me help you if I can," Hepworth said. " What is it ? "

" To see George."

" George ? "

" There is something I want him to do. I said just now—you may remember perhaps—I had known Elsie before we met in France. She comes from Hildon."

" I see. That, of course, made a bond between you."

" Her father has a small farm down there—about 150 acres. He has never done very well, and even the War hasn't helped him much. He's getting old. He ought to give up. Now, as it happens, he has just had a stroke of luck. They

are beginning to build about Hildon, and land—at least some land—fetches a big price. It depends on the situation. Old Holmes's farm stands on a quite ideal spot for a house, and a man from the Midlands—probably a profiteer !—has offered him a fancy sum. The difficulty is that he can't give a frontage. The man will buy the farm, if he can get a couple of fields between it and the road. These fields belong to George—and George has refused to sell. It wouldn't hurt him to sell, for Holmes's farm is ever so far from our place, and he could get any price he liked. But George hates the way they are building down there, and—naturally—he bars the idea of this Midlands man."

"But if he knew about you and Elsie—"

"That's it. I don't think, if he knew, he would stand in Holmes's way."

"Holmes himself does not know ? "

"No one at Hildon knows."

"But it is Elsie who has told you of the offer ? "

"No—George. I have no idea whether Elsie has heard of it or not. But I know she has been worried about her father."

Hepworth considered. "Can't you see George yourself ? "

"I haven't time. I have only till to-morrow night, and in the morning I am to see our lawyer. In the afternoon"—he hesitated—"in the afternoon I am going to see Elsie."

"Couldn't George come up to see you ? You could telephone to him now. I have once or twice telephoned to Susan."

Bertie shook his head. "I can't do it like that. Elsie is not in London, and I shall only get back in time to catch the boat train. I couldn't tell him in a five minutes' talk on a platform. He would probably get a wrong impression."

Hepworth took it in. "I think you are right," he said. "In the afternoon you go to see Elsie ? "

"Yes."

"And the child ? "

"That's it. She wants me to see it. There mayn't be another chance, you know."

A note that Hepworth detected in the young man's voice made him ask, " And you yourself want to see it ? "

Bertie laughed uneasily. " It's deucedly queer, isn't it ? "

" No," Hepworth said, " it doesn't seem to me queer."

" Well—I do ! "

" Something within you stirs ? "

Bertie laughed more uneasily still. He realised that his position might possess, for some people, an element known to comedy. Realising this, " Oh, damn ! " was all he could say.

But it was enough for Hepworth. " I will see George," he said.

Bertie expressed, or tried to express, the relief and the gratitude he felt.

" You could see him fairly soon ? "

Hepworth turned to his engagement book. " I can go on Monday. The sooner I go the better, for I shall have to find a pretext for my visit, and if I go at once, I can make one out of my seeing you."

Bertie thanked him again.

After a slight pause, he added, " There is just one thing more. If I don't come back, would you mind telling Sue ? Yourself, I mean. I should like her to hear from you."

Hepworth was a little surprised. " Susan ? "

" You see, she knew Elsie as a little girl. Better than I did, of course. I knew her chiefly by sight. She sang in the choir. Sue would be very much interested."

Hepworth started. " *Interested ?* "

Bertie saw that his statement needed qualification. " Oh, she would be shocked, of course : Sue's not very modern. But—" he couldn't help smiling—" I know Sue would be interested. The point is, however, that there might be things that Sue could do."

Harmless, no doubt, as was Bertie's smile, Hepworth was troubled by it. Susan, he was sure, would be shocked; in Bertie's sense of the word, Susan was not very " modern." And yet Bertie was right. Not only would Susan be " interested," but her interest would be of a kind markedly different from his.

Nothing of this, however, appeared in his tone when he said, "Your luck will hold out all right. In any case, you can count on Susan and me."

Once more Bertie thanked him.

Hepworth took up the telephone. "I will ring George up," he said. "It is too late to write."

After some little delay, Hepworth delivered his message.

"Is it George?" Bertie asked.

"No, I think it is one of the maids. Do you care to speak yourself?"

"Better not," Bertie said. "Might have to explain."

Hepworth hung up the receiver.

Now that the business was settled, it came to him that he had had enough. He was not tired—he was never tired, but he felt a disinclination to go on. He looked at the clock, and having brought the hour to Bertie's notice, softened an inhospitable suggestion of bed with the offer of a hospitable whiskey and soda—which Bertie declined.

But when Bertie, having said Good Night, had reached the door, Hepworth stopped him.

"You mentioned just now that you were not a millionaire," he said, "and your expenses must have been rather heavy of late. And there is the future to think of. Would it be any comfort or convenience to you to increase your balance at the bank?"

Bertie was really moved. "It's most awfully good of you," he said.

"Think it over," Hepworth suggested.

Bertie turned back for a meditative step or two, and made a brief calculation. With an irony of which he was quite unaware, he paused, as he made it, under the grim nose of Savonarola's bust on the cabinet that stood near the door. "It's awfully good of you," he repeated, "but I think I can manage all right. Elsie is not very extravagant."

"Well, see that she has all she needs."

And, with an effect of dismissal, Hepworth took up a paper lying on his table.

PART III

I

"And all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes."

Gladys's eyelids were far from "weary," and Susan was quite sure that, unlike the Vampire, she had not been "dead many times"; but as Susan sat in her wickerwork chair deep in the shade of the trees, the tops of whose shadows would soon cross the lines of the tennis court, and listened to the talk of Gladys and John, she was reminded in a queer absurd kind of way of the Mona Lisa of Pater's prose. When and where and how had Gladys picked up these strange odds and ends of knowledge? Susan, who knew how Gladys's days were passed, felt certain she could not have picked them all up in this life. Susan would hardly have claimed that her own days were passed in study, but she had listened too often to the talk of John and his friends not to know the books that one had to read. Gladys had no more read the books than she had, and was not nearly so familiar with their titles. And yet she had caught, or seemed to have caught, the ideas for which they stood. And there were always Gladys's clothes. Susan could never look at Gladys without, in a way of her own, being aware of Gladys's clothes. At that moment, for instance, they suggested so little—the conversation had taken this turn—an interest in what John called religious reconstruction. So, what with one thing and another, her ideas, her beauty, her clothes, Susan, as she listened to Gladys's talk, felt that the thought of lyres and flutes absurdly conveyed her impression.

"Yes," Gladys was saying, in her soft, clear, carrying tones, "it's time we went back to polytheism."

"Polytheism?" John inquired.

"Well, we began with monotheism, didn't we?"

John was still taking her seriously—at least, to a certain point. " It might be better not to call it monotheism," he said. " But the conception of an ultimate invisible force or energy does appear to have preceded a belief in separate and personal gods."

" They called it Wakonda or Mana, didn't they ? "

Susan gasped. How on earth had Gladys heard of Wakonda ?

John was for avoiding qualifications as far as he could. " Those are two names for the Power," he said.

" Well, something like that came first. Then we tried polytheism. Then we tried monotheism. And now we are giving polytheism another turn. We are all making gods of our own—Invisible Kings and so on. And isn't it much better we should ? We are less likely to quarrel."

John gave it up. " You are as bad as Renan's *gamin* ! " he laughed.

Susan waited. Had Gladys heard, too, of Renan's *gamin* ?

She had. " He picked up Renan's ideas, didn't he, when he was turning somersaults on the pavement ? "

" No, he had them first ! " John laughed.

So for a time, with the help of John's laugh, they pleasantly kept it up. But Susan's attention wandered.

The insecurity of her hold on the scene of the passing moment made the scene and the moment more precious. No other scene justified so fully as this her faith in the things she loved. The garden was not very old, but to Susan it seemed, like the moor of the ancient stones, one of those places the world never could have been without ! You could never get a garden like this by " planning " it. It had taken centuries (it had taken, in fact, eighty years) for the grass to grow with this fineness, and without the immemorial trees beneath which she sat how could you have had these shadows ? The shadows would soon be over the clean white lines of the tennis court and be stealing more gaiety from the grass, but the lawn beyond would remain a wide sun-lit space. It was because there was plenty of room for both

sunlight and shadow that the garden was such a perfectly restful place. It was because its privacy was so spacious that its quiet appeared so deep. And whoever had laid the garden out (and, after all, some one must !), he had known when to be formal and when to leave things to chance. Susan liked the suggestion of ceremony, of old-world fashions and manners, of old-world costumes and courtesies, that she could imagine hovered still over the sundial with its green copper plate and small grey pillar of stone, and over the oval of prim stiff beds before the southern front of the house. But who would have expected to find the rose walk and the yew walk, and the queer little lily pond in the dell, just where they happened to be ? The house was not very old either, and the only beauty it could claim lay in the colour of its bricks ; but this afternoon, as Susan saw it with an effect of distance, with the sun on the creeper and the bricks, and on the open summer-like windows with their hint at nice old rooms inside, she felt it was a blessed thing to have had a house like this for one's home. Nothing in the scene was very old, as age is counted in matters like these, but it did speak to Susan of a world of old, pious, restful things, and was not to love such a scene as this to have faith in the past and its pieties ?

For a little while the sound of John's laugh kept the lyres and flutes, or the thought of them, still jingling in Susan's head :—in the end the laugh prevailed. It was a pleasant laugh—fresh, spontaneous, young : the laugh of a man quite free from pedantry, quite free from any kind of fanaticism. It was a laugh, Susan knew, that genuinely expressed one side of him. But she could seldom respond to it. It had the perverse effect of reminding her of the side it did not express, and this not only seemed to her much the more important side, but was the side to which, as time went on, her response grew weaker and weaker.

Though she had ceased to follow what they said, she knew that it was John now who did most of the talking, and that Gladys was glad to listen. It was always like this with

John : he had a way of interesting people. He did not interest every one : some people he merely bewildered, others he distinctly repelled. But most intelligent persons who gave him a chance, who were not too anxious to talk themselves, found he could be very good company. She remembered how much she had once been interested herself. She remembered how important she had thought the work he was doing, how momentous she had found his ideas ! She had felt sometimes, as she listened to him, as if she were assisting at the making of history. No doubt, in the atmosphere of the world in which aunt Frances lived, big things looked still bigger ; but she had not lost—this was not her trouble at all—a belief in the importance of his work. What she had discovered was that the things which were of importance to him were not, and had never been, of any great importance to her.

On one point, however, her perceptions were still the same.

John was sitting so near to Gladys that it was difficult to see the face of the one without seeing the face of the other. It was a severe test for any one to be seen in proximity to Gladys. Almost any face beside hers became as common clay beside the work of the perfect potter. But John stood the test very well. He did not make a companion picture—he was not so good-looking as that ! but he might have appeared on the same wall without doing her the least discredit. And the test was the more severe, Susan thought, because John, like Gladys, was dark. His face had individuality, a very marked individuality indeed, a freedom from the trammels of type, an expression that left you uncertain how far he was a man of imagination, how far a man of will, a look in his intriguing dark eye that Susan still failed to interpret. You would have had to pause in any gallery, she felt, before a face with the challenge of his. And he looked very big. Gladys's slightness made him look especially big. He belonged to a world of big things—big men, big purposes, big battles. A man like that should have

the world at his feet. And this very reflection, even in the act of her making it, threw a light on the extent of her own detachment. For her, he was no more than " a man like that." With her respect and her admiration there mingled some self-reproach.

Susan's eye returned to the house. Sarah, burdened with the tray for their tea, was passing the sundial in the middle of the prim, stiff beds. The figure of Sarah, who had once been Susan's nurse and had passed from nurse to housekeeper, was always a welcome sight. It was pleasant to watch her coming. It was pleasant to see her spread the white cloth on the wicker table which she moved a little nearer to Susan's chair, and lay out the things that she had brought on her tray. From time to time she made small appeals to Susan, the laying of garden tea tables not being one of her usual duties : Florence was taking Rose's two little girls for a walk, their nurse being confined to her bed. Sarah was now in the earlier seventies, with movements less alert than she wished them to seem, with grey hair, a fresh cheek, thin lips that were inclined to twitch a little, and shrewd old eyes of a cheerful and motherly wisdom. She wore a black dress with a thin gold chain hanging from her neck, and a gold brooch with a young lock of Susan's hair at the back of it. She smiled at Susan and Susan smiled at her. She had been in the family for years before Susan was born.

" You must pour out tea, Miss Susan," she whispered, and Susan very much enjoyed the " miss." It appeared that George and aunt Jane were on their way, but that Rose still had claims that kept her.

It was wonderful how Sarah brought things back ! She brought the old days back, the days in the nursery, the days of her growing-up, all the days that ought to have belonged to her mother. Sarah had been her mother. A world of little intimate things lay between them ; the things that made family stories and the things that no one but Sarah knew ; little cares and confidences of all sorts and kinds, from

memories of important little joys and sorrows to memories of precious little toys and treasures ; and little intimacies, that were useful still, of clothes and small comforts and the body : all the things that you took to Sarah and told her just because she was always Sarah. . . .

When she went back to the house, Susan watched her figure emerge from the shadow that had crept over the lines of the tennis court, and pass out into the sunlight beyond. Then she looked once more at John, and she thought he seemed bigger than ever.

II

The influences of the scene and the hour made for amicable adjustments. The shade of the big trees was pleasant to sit in, and there was a restfulness in their lengthening shadows. Aunt Jane was being refreshed by her tea. But Susan knew that even if circumstances had been less favourable, she would have had nothing to fear. Things had gone well from the first. In her judgments of women aunt Jane could be deliberate enough, but her first impressions of men were final. She decided the victim's fate the moment he entered the arena. And yesterday, two minutes after aunt Jane had shaken John's hand (they had met in the drawing-room just before lunch), Susan had seen her thumbs go up. Susan had been both pleased and perplexed. She could not tell what had done it. There were John's good looks, of course, and there were the fine proportions of his figure ; but manner counted for as much as good looks with aunt Jane (so, at least, Susan supposed), and she had not thought that aunt Jane would like John's manner. It was beyond calculation—the way people would take one another. It seemed to depend on the accidents of the moment, and on that most mysterious of all things, temperament. If anything could lie deeper than aunt Jane's prejudices, it might, perhaps, be aunt Jane's temperament. In any case, when they had gone in to lunch, the smile on her lips had been as gracious as the light in her eyes was bright.

At lunch, too, Fortune, like another aunt Jane, had smiled. The things they had talked about had been the right things to make aunt Jane feel comfortable. They had begun with Bertie, of course, about whom every one had been anxious to hear ; and then they had talked of motor cars and restaurants and the War. That is to say, Gladys and

George and John had talked. Aunt Jane, gracious still, but sparing of effort and content with the general drift, had merely applied her tests. And Susan, who understood their nature very well, knew how illiberal these tests could be. But aunt Jane's first impression held good. Motor cars and restaurants and the War were nice, safe, conventional topics, and created a conventional background for John's supposed manner of life. Nevertheless, even in such talk as this, his essential difference stood out. Certainly, he tried to conform. He had tact ; he was adaptable ; he had met no end of people, he had moved in more kinds of world than one. On no occasion had she ever seen him look out of it. The very size of his Self, if one might so put it, made for self-possession. Susan remembered too many occasions to which she herself had not been equal not to respect—though she was a little estranged by—his adequacy for all emergencies. She was estranged because she would have liked to acknowledge her shyness to him—and she never could ; for the social gift, for which he mistakenly gave her credit, was one of her attractions for him—one of the things for which he had married her. This was why it was such a comfort to be with dear old George again : he, too, seldom looked out of it, but sometimes, she knew, it cost him a good deal not to.

Still John didn't belong. He was different. His voice was different ; his words and phrases were different. His speech never had the looseness of theirs, however free from pedantry it might be. His personality stuck out through all his attempts at conformity. His heart wasn't in it. What people said interested him very little, and they themselves didn't interest him at all—when, at least, they were just ordinary people. If he was seldom bored, it was in part because he did most of the talking himself, and enjoyed the feel of his own proficiency ; and in part because he lived so fast that he was soon through the passing moment. He had enough tact, and enough real consideration for others, to do his best not to dominate ; but in the end he

usually did. The others dropped out—they seemed to get left behind. He had so much more to say—and was it his fault that they had not his rich vitality? But was this the kind of thing one would have expected aunt Jane to like?

Aunt Jane finished her tea, and Susan found a place on the tray for the cup for which she had no further use. Aunt Jane sat back in her chair, amiable and refreshed, stately, impressive, monumental. She and John confronted one another like embodiments of the forces of two opposing worlds. John, with his conscious intention to remove—to remove all the undemocratic influences and institutions for which she stood, and aunt Jane, with her unconscious intention to persist. On the surface, however, nothing of this appeared. She was amiably letting John talk to her, and he talked with his usual good faith. He was one of those persons to whom queer little things seemed to have been constantly happening. Even now, after three years of marriage, Susan had not heard of all the curious little instances and incidents, the exciting little encounters and strange chances, of which he had to tell. No life could have been less adventurous, as adventure is commonly understood, but he had a way, so to speak, of being in places "at the time." He had been in Sicily at the time of a dreadful earthquake; he had been in an American city at the time of a famous fire. He had known so many queer as well as so many able and important people: people with queer enthusiasms, people with queer ideas. And he had not missed their queerness. He had an eye for interesting points, and mercifully omitted the others. If aunt Jane were not interested now—and Susan knew she was not, the fault was really not his. Aunt Jane's refusal or inability to be interested was indeed a remarkable fact. But it had helped in her relations with John. At dinner last night, and again at lunch to-day, they had talked of other things than motor cars and the War, and John, following Gladys's lead, had discussed ideas which aunt Jane would not have found comfortable, if she had paid any attention to them. But

she had paid no more attention to John's ideas than she was in the habit of paying to Gladys's. The fact that you discussed them with Gladys would cover a multitude of ideas. She did not take her daughter from the point of view of ideas. And, as Susan saw, she did not take John either. She had swept aside his church and all that it meant to him as nothing more than a rich man's hobby. One of these days she would find a formula for him as she had found a formula for aunt Frances. To be able to go through life with so little interest in so many interesting things was a wonderful trait in aunt Jane. It deepened the mystery of her marriages. How had she been able to discover three men in whom she could be sufficiently interested to marry them?

But aunt Jane had another side. And of this other side Susan became aware when, John having turned to talk to George, aunt Jane turned to talk to her.

"The grass wants mowing," she said, "but otherwise the garden looks very well. Ours at Weyburn begins to look sadly neglected. You have a garden at Hampstead, John tells me."

"Yes. A strip of lawn and a pergola."

"And a view all over London?"

"I am very fond of our view," Susan said.

She felt that aunt Jane's hard, merry eye was on her. "Altogether," she added, "I think you are very fortunate."

"I am sure you would like our house," Susan said.

But she had quite understood. The words were aunt Jane's definite acceptance of John, and the look asked as plainly as words could have done, "What's the matter with you? Why aren't you happy with him?"

Certainly, Susan reflected, things did work out in strange ways. Here was aunt Jane definitely ranged on John's side, and bestowing her disapproval on *her*! For some inscrutable reason, with every probable chance against it, she had taken a fancy to John. To John!—with whom she had not

one point in common! Had she always been like this? Had the fancies she had taken to people always had inscrutable reasons?—the fancies she had taken to men?

Susan looked out from the shadows of the trees once more and let her gaze wander across the sunlit lawn, and, beyond the lawn, across the formal space of the flowerbeds, till it settled on the restful old house where the sun shone on the creeper. The scene had the same restfulness as before, the same suggestion of a life of dignity and leisure. Many things work out in strange ways, and something in the scene softened her feeling for aunt Jane. After all, aunt Jane belonged to it. The inner secret of the charm and the mellowness lay in that tradition of the past and its dignities in which aunt Jane had her part. Not to be too critical of aunt Jane was like a small act of piety. Her mental limitations were a trial, but there was more in life than ideas. Interested as she was in ideas, Susan put experience first—social, domestic, human. And the more you gained in experience, the deeper your committal to human contacts and obligations became, the less likely were you to make light of aunt Jane's standards and judgment and advice. Behind her limitations, her prejudices, her hardness, her cynicism, lay a deep commonsense, a firm hold on fundamental things, to which, horrid as it might be to do it, in the end you were apt to come round. It was rather an unpleasant admission, but what were fundamental things for aunt Jane often proved fundamental for you. Susan had felt a great need to come back—to be with her people again, with people at her own point of view:—and . . . well, the worldliness of aunt Jane rested her. It softened her self-reproach. Was there not a kind of meanness, an element, perhaps, of self-interest, in her holding back from, in her not throwing in her lot with, these progressive movements and causes, in which—after a fashion, at least—she was inclined to believe? Something in the presence of aunt Jane made the holding back seem wise. Susan did not think that she herself was cynical, but she had an uneasy

idea that the world might be less unlike aunt Jane's conception of it than that of some of the enthusiasts she knew. If only she had not been so hard and illiberal. . . .

And there were Rose and Gladys and George.

Gladys, to put it quite simply, had been a perfect godsend. Without her, it would all have been much more difficult, as it would assuredly have been more dull. Serene, detached, disillusioned, interested, flippant and clever and shrewd, with her strange odds and ends of knowledge, her tact and her feathery touch, she had helped them to turn their corners, to fill their gaps, and generally to keep things going. She had set John talking about matters in which he was really interested, and which were certainly interesting to George. George liked good talk, but could not always get it for himself. Poor Rose had been a little bewildered. Her feelings, as Susan was aware, were not a little mixed and divided. Undoubtedly John lay outside the range of her usual experience of men. She was not accustomed, for instance, to hearing the future of religion discussed at lunch or dinner. There had been moments when Susan had winced—for her sake—at things that were being said. But John had been very nice to her, really very nice indeed, and Rose, like aunt Jane, did not take people from the point of view of ideas. And, anyhow, Rose was a dear. But Susan understood that though Rose would do her best not to show it, she did think her marriage was strange.

At the end of it all there was George. It was George about whom she cared most, whom she most wanted to make friends with John. It seemed to her now, as she watched them talking together (Gladys had gone back to the house), that something in George's attitude, George's expression, suggested not only that he had made friends with John, but that there was the beginning of a real understanding between them. And knowing the slow, cautious way in which George's estimates of people were formed, she felt the least little shade of surprise.

Yesterday afternoon, after lunch, George had taken John for a stroll. On their return, when John had left him, she met George in the hall.

"How did you get on?" she had asked.

His tone had been touched with a brusqueness to which she was not accustomed in George. "Oh, all right, of course. Why shouldn't we?"

It had occurred to her, however, as she had been on the point of leaving him, that the cause of this ill-humour could hardly, after all, be John.

"Something wrong?" she had asked.

"Everything!"

"But in particular—?"

He had crossed the hall with an over-deliberation, and hung his hat on a peg. When he came back, his manner to her was different.

"The War seems always to be getting you somewhere. If it doesn't get you one way, it contrives to get you another."

"Has John been telling you things? He does hear a good deal."

George had smiled rather grimly. "Well, yes," he said, "he has."

"More than he told us at lunch?"

George had still smiled. "No. He didn't mention it at lunch."

Then, quite suddenly, he had been himself again. "Come along, Sue," he said, "let's have tea. Is it to be in the garden?"

As they had crossed the space of the flowerbeds, he had slipped his arm into hers, and had answered her original question. "Yes, we got on very well," he said.

"I am glad."

"I showed him things. He doesn't know a cabbage from a cucumber."

"But he owned up?"

"Yes," George admitted, "I expect he seldom pretends."

" And isn't it rather an engaging trait ? "

He had drawn her towards one of the beds, released his useful right arm, and snapped off a withered stalk. Again he had appeared to be a little deliberate. " He's sound, Sue," he said, still stooping over the bed.

Susan had made her answer as light as she could. " I am glad there are things between you all right."

His tone, too, had been light. " More, perhaps, than you suppose."

Rose, at that moment, had met them, and they had strolled on together to the others.

Now it occurred to Susan, as she watched George's attitude and expression, that in the course of that walk with John things must have taken a very fortunate turn indeed.

III

She and John were alone.

George and aunt Jane—perhaps to this end—had sauntered back to the house. In less than an hour George would drive John to the station, for John had to be in town that night. His work at the Ministry of Reconstruction would claim him again on the morrow.

She and John were alone.

The tea table, a little untidy and littered, and the empty chairs in which the others had sat, looked the least little bit melancholy. She would have liked Florence, who probably by this time had brought the children home, to take the tea things away. A plate, left in the chair which had been kept for Rose, ought, she felt, not to be there. Over much of their end of the tennis court the trees now cast a shadow, though the tape of the sagging net shone white and clean in the sunlight. People complained that, in late afternoon, the light on this court was not good. Why had not George, she wondered, had the other court marked out?

John, on the opposite side of the table, sat very still, quietly smoking a cigarette. The slow movement of his arm when he raised the cigarette to his lips, and the slow rise of his chin when he blew the smoke out, made the stillness of his body seem deeper. His head, like her own, was uncovered, and noticing the neatness of his dark hair, she wished her own could be kept as tidy out-of-doors; she noticed the little wave in the lock brushed back from his forehead at the parting. He was at work. In odd moments he would drop off to work as some people dropped off to sleep. He looked happy.

Presently, as the moments passed, she felt he looked

unfamiliar. It was as if—so she felt—she were seeing him for the first time since his coming. He looked different. No, it was not quite that : he looked the same—the difference lay in herself. His absence, the break in the habit of being with him, the break in the routine of their life, the way she was living now in an older and entirely different world of thoughts and of things, of much older affections and memories, had given her a new perception, had given her, so to speak, new eyes. She experienced a deeper detachment, something between them gave way. It was incredible that he should be here—in a world with which he had nothing to do. She could not believe that it was she herself who had brought him.

A little breath of wind came from the trees behind her, made the corners of the cloth on the table flutter, and in passing touched her hair. Involuntarily, she put up her hand. With an almost amusing suddenness, the current of her thoughts was changed. She remembered there were questions that she had forgotten to ask. Was cook as unreasonable as ever about the rationing restrictions—especially about the sugar? Had Rose mentioned the presents from the farm that she intended him to take back to town? There were one or two things she wished him to tell Fanny to send. But an absurd self-consciousness seized her. She couldn't recover the right intonation—the natural tone of her talk with John. And the thing was quite idiotic! She forced herself to break the spell, and the impetus of her effort carried her to a question which she put a little too naturally to make it just the right kind of question for John.

"Do you like being here?" she asked.

His attention was hers at once. "I have enjoyed my visit very much," he said.

Susan regretted her question. His "visit"! That was what it had been for him, a "visit" like any other! No, not like any other, for family feeling was deep in John, and he knew the importance of a first meeting with her people.

But he had come to it with a mind at rest. He was too much in the habit of meeting people, new and important people, and had too many things of importance to think about, to let the occasion weigh on him. Besides, men did not feel about meeting their wives' relations as women felt about meeting their husbands'. Still when she thought of what his coming had meant to them. . . .

"I didn't quite mean that," she said.

His attention deepened. His attention always deepened when one gave him a point to seize.

"What *did* you mean?" he asked.

She couldn't tell him. "This is my old home, you know," she found herself saying rather feebly.

"And it's a delightful home to have had!"

There was the little lilt in his voice, and Susan knew he wished to be nice to her: when he wished to be nice to people, his voice often had the lilt. But a vision, a perverse and quite needless vision, of the wonderful gardens at his home in the North suddenly rose up before her. They were very wonderful gardens indeed: gardens (one always used the plural) that people were justified in paying a Thursday sixpence to see (Thursday was early closing day at Arkington). The rare rock plants and flowers, the high waterfall from the big brown crags, the pretty little mountain stream that came babbling over its rocky bed, the charm of a miniature wildness that the place did really give you:—all she had against it was that it reminded you somehow of the incredible sum it had cost—and she detested the Thursday sixpence. She knew he wished to be nice to her, but she also knew that he thought her dear old garden commonplace.

"It looks nice and old," she said.

He had a sensitive ear. Her attachment to the old, however innocent its expression might be, was a trait to which he failed to overcome his sensitiveness. When she spoke of old things, she seemed to gain a subtle advantage. He had a sense that a subtle and elusive slight was being

put on other things—things it was essential to him to defend.

"The house does not seem to me very old," he said.

His tone had changed—and Susan let the matter drop. He was right, as he always was—the house was not very old! But if he had lived in it for a hundred years it would have meant no more to him than it meant after twenty-four hours.

She inquired about the cook; mentioned Rose's promise of the butter; and asked him to give Fanny her message. She had learnt to trust his memory, and he was as obliging as he was practical. He could have run the house very well without her.

They were silent again.

At last Sarah came to them, and took the tea things away. She had to make two journeys to the house. Susan noticed that she had now much further to go before she emerged from the shadow. As Susan saw her enter the house on her second return, she remembered with a keen little pleasure that to-night Sarah would come to her room before the second gong sounded for dinner. She had not come last night.

This time, Hepworth did not drop off to work. He divined the element of reticence, of conscious reserve, that lay behind Susan's silence, and he felt a slight irritation.

He was still quietly smoking, and, as the ash on his cigarette lengthened, he looked quietly at Susan.

The eyes with which he saw Susan now were the eyes with which he had seen her before their marriage. Her face had the same charm for him, her personality the same appeal. His love had heightened the charm to beauty, as the appeal had been heightened to a need that marriage alone could satisfy. The strain of a Quaker soberness, which he had inherited from his mother, appeared in his feeling for women. He would not have cared to marry a woman more brilliant in either position or person or mind. But he had cared to marry a gentlewoman.

Her face had the same charm for him. He could not have done without the intelligence of her dark quiet eyes—an intelligence unaggressive, good-tempered, devoid of edge, but receptive, attentive, honest. He could not have done without the suggestion of a certain measure of pride, or, at all events, of a measure of firmness—a quality of breeding as much as a quality of feature. But he delighted in the very feminine prettiness of her dark wavy hair, the feminine curve of her cheek, the tone and texture of a really beautiful skin. He found something attractive in the slight forward bend of the head (it was hardly a stoop), which gave her, as it gave her brother George, a lingering look of attention. He liked women to be tall. At Mrs. Hathaway's Sunday afternoons, she had been a very gracious figure. It was she who had made these gatherings go. Mrs. Hathaway, hampered by the people—the more important people—who liked to surround her chair, would at times be negligent of the others. Susan had come to their rescue. She had brought together persons who had seemed at all likely to get on, had established them on their common ground, and had never neglected their tea. In her manner of doing these things he had discovered a special gift, which had had for him a special charm. Her quietness had defined itself, in a very effective way, against the emphasis and insistence of the others : of the women, that is, who took strong lines and held strong views, often at variance with his own. The confidence and ease, for which he gave her credit, appeared to him as the fruit of a fine tradition. When he had dined with the Hathaways (they became Hathaways in the evening through Mr. Hathaway's importance at dinner), he had found her as interested, as responsive, as intelligent a listener as in the cooler air of the more exposed Sunday afternoons ; but he had found her more charming still in her evening frocks, and, in the more genial light of the evening scene, her tradition had commended itself still more to his taste. It had never occurred to him to consider how far she really belonged to his world of strenuous

endeavour. No suspicion that she might be only a bird of passage had ever crossed his mind.

Susan realised that her silence troubled him, and realising too that it was an unreasonable silence, felt that she owed it to him to break it. She knew he had meant to be nice to her.

" Bertie, you said, had the same room as before ? "

" Yes. Fanny looked after him."

This, Susan understood very well, was not quite the true account.

" I expect it was you who did most of the looking."

" No. Fanny was very good."

" Well, anyhow," Susan sighed, " it's a mercy we have her ! She has treated us better than the others. I wonder," she added, " Bertie did not come down to us here."

" He had not time," Hepworth said.

" He had all Sunday ! "

" It was a very short leave."

" Wasn't it odd that they didn't give him longer ? "

" I should say myself he was fortunate to get any leave at all. Men can't be spared just now."

" Did he mind going back very much ? "

" Yes," Hepworth admitted, " I think he did."

The sense of a poignancy in the quiet of this sheltered place stole over Susan and hurt her ; she felt the reproach and the cruelty of the tranquil shadows that now covered the sagging net. The games on this court that Bertie and she had once had ! And now. . . .

" I wish I had seen him," she said.

" I know," Hepworth told her, " he wanted very much to see you."

She was looking once more at the house : she saw George step out from the drawing-room window, and go in the direction of the rose walk.

" Do you think Bertie is like George ? " she asked.

The stroll after lunch, for which George had taken him esterday, came back to Hepworth's mind. He had not

noticed a likeness of feature, but a marked moral resemblance had struck him. George had been quite prepared for his story. Not, of course, for the particular story he had had to tell, but for one more or less like it. And George had seen Bertie's point, with regard to the obligation imposed, from just Bertie's own point of view. They seemed to live by the same social code, and to have the same indifference to any other. Now it occurred to him that they were alike in face.

"Yes : one can see they are brothers," he said.

Susan smiled. "Bertie and I are great pals," she added.

The word jarred on Hepworth. It evoked, from his talk with Bertie that evening, just the impression which he would have been most willing to forget. He remembered those unwelcome moments in which certain traits he had discovered in Bertie had made him think of his sister, and he had seen them as united, in a subtle way, by the bond of their difference from himself.

"You understand him," he said.

A note in his voice made her ask, "You don't?"

Hepworth held back. "I see his good points," he said.

"Only that!"

Hepworth said no more. He felt that for the sake of Bertie's confidences it would be unwise to discuss him further.

But Susan, unaware of the consideration he showed, of the motive of loyalty to her brother that his reticence contained, took his unresponsiveness as one proof the more of how little the things that meant most to her ever seemed to mean to him. It was always more or less like this : whatever she talked about to him, either he wasn't interested, or, for some reason, he disapproved. If his reasons had been like other people's, chance, haphazard things, there might have been some hope : but there was a tremendous consistency in his reasons ; they were always linked up with that immense system of knowledge and conviction, by which his work and his life were inspired. The great towering system was always there, and its shadow was always on her. It was to escape from the shadow that she had come down

to Hildon Place. And if only—if only he had not come, too ! It would have been so much easier to go back to him, if he had not made her realise, by his being here, what it would mean to go back.

Suddenly, she grew very still. She had a sense, sudden but very definite, that something unforeseen had happened to her. She had never thought in this way before. She had never acknowledged to herself—she had never known—that she was so reluctant to go back. The suddenness of the thing frightened her. Its extraordinary definiteness frightened her. The thought of its consequences frightened her. To what did an admission of this kind lead? And why had it happened at this particular moment ? The moment looked so like any other ! But it was certainly true : she did feel a reluctance—perhaps she felt something more—to go back and begin again. . . .

She remembered John's train, and reminding him of it, she rose rather quickly from her chair. They crossed the tennis court, and came out into the warm brightness of the sun. The warmth was grateful to her ; she realised, now that she was moving again, that the air in the deepening shade had grown chilly. They walked on. As they approached the flower beds, a strange feeling came to her—a sense of something she had left behind. The feeling was so vivid that she was almost tempted to turn and look back as if this something were a material thing that she might see among the empty shadows. In another step or two her mind grew clearer, and she understood what the feeling meant. There *was* something that she had left behind, something that, with this long afternoon, had ended. She had left behind the first phase of her life with John—the phase of unawakened acquiescence.

IV

Sarah came.

There had been an interval, after she had changed her dress, in which Susan had waited for her. As soon as she had seen John drive away, she had come up to her own room. The look it had worn had troubled her. She could not feel, even when the door was closed, that she was really quite alone. She could not feel as she knew she had felt only the day before yesterday. None of John's belongings remained, but little differences, little changes in the position of things, told of his having been there. A small table had been placed beside his bed ; a blotting-book, with the envelope of a letter he had answered, lay open on another table, and the chair on which he had sat looked as if he had just got up from it ; on the drawers and the dressing-table were small spaces from which things of hers had been moved to make room for things of his. She felt a strange sinking of the heart, and she felt an intimate recoil. She moved the table from the bed, and placed it against the wall ; she closed the blotting-book, and took the chair away ; she carefully rearranged her things on the dressing-table and the drawers. And still the room did not look as it had looked before he came. Its air of security was spoilt. She had shared it with him—it was not hers alone. Would any room ever again, now that this idea had come to her, give her a sense of being hers alone ?

She had dressed for dinner, and in the familiar act of taking things off and putting things on she had discovered an odd absurd little intimate comfort. She had regained a feeling of belonging to herself.

Too tired to stand, and too restless to be comfortable, she had found a seat on the broad ledge of the deep-set window

to wait for Sarah's coming. There was the daylight still of our Summer Time, but the sun no longer shone, and the green of the garden, as she saw it below her, had the sombreness of an untimely dusk. The unlit grass, the earth of the beds, the stone of the pedestal and short pillar on which the sundial stood, made a flat, dead, toneless picture. Beyond the lawn and the tennis court she could see the empty chairs still sociably grouped as John and she had left them. As she looked at the empty chairs, it was as if she had not left them—so vividly did the last moments of her talk with John return. Already, even in the hour that had passed, her reluctance to go back had deepened. What had happened to her here in this room proved how real what had happened out there had been. She turned from the window and glanced at the objects she had moved : the blotting-book she had closed, the table she had taken from the side of his bed. By these trivial acts she had acknowledged and made more definite the change in her feeling towards him. And with the definiteness of the thing there was its unexpectedness, its unlikeliness, the sheer surprise of the thing's having happened to her. Was there any one about whom she had ever felt in this way before?—any one, that is, who belonged to her, who had a right to claim her affection? Certainly, John had that : he had always been very good to her. She was afraid. She was afraid of herself, afraid of the future—she felt like a child in the dark. . . .

She wished Sarah would come.

She left the ledge of the window. The garden had become too sombre. Was there any time of quite so penetrating a sadness as a summer evening when the light had turned cold and grey?

Perhaps she would not come. The second gong would sound in a very few minutes.

How strange it was that after all these years to have Sarah to go to should mean almost as much as it had meant when she was a child! There was no

love, no kind of love at all, that felt in the least like hers. . . .

Sarah came.

Susan didn't say anything—anything, at least, that mattered. She went to her.

The old woman took her in her arms.

PART IV

I

Hepworth stood bareheaded with the others.

Little by little, almost imperceptibly, the police had checked the docile traffic, and brought it gently to a pause. The private car, the motor bus, the motor lorry, the hooded van, the contractor's cart, the vehicles of advertisement and delivery, all the manifold ingenuities of London transport, looked, in their stillness, like a fleet magically becalmed in some strange refuge of the streets. For once the business of men in the great waters of Regent Street, Piccadilly, the Haymarket, had ceased to be the business of gain. On the pavements, and on the islands in the roadway, people, chance, every day people, whom a power not of every day had overtaken and transformed, reverently remembered their dead. The silence, in the soft mistiness of the November morning, seemed easy of dedication to memory. Civilisation for the moment had changed its aspect, had momentarily changed its values. From a place of electric signs and advertisements, of theatres and restaurants and shopwindows, of a traffic of entertainment and pleasure, the Circus had become holy ground where men were reverent, and men were still, and a benediction of quietness possessed them.

Hepworth was profoundly moved.

He loved the public observance, the public occasion, he loved the great public act. He loved to see men massed, as it were, in fulfilment of his ideal conception. And this act, in which he himself was now taking part, was an immense confirmation of his faith, a source of immense encouragement. He felt that men were being themselves, the selves for which he habitually gave them credit, those deeper selves always ready to respond to the call of a finer purpose.

When the disguise of his grossness and his vanity had dropped away, *this* was what man really was. He needed the call, he needed the chance to be reverent. Of the discords of the scene, the irony of its contrasts, of the vast materialism of all this commercial traffic, of the intimations of what would pass on these pavements when the lamps were lit, Hepworth's sense was dim : but as he looked at the faces of the people near him and of the drivers of the vehicles in the roadway, he had a sense of a world at prayer. Great devotion still kept its sacramental power, and when men felt the reality of its presence, here in Piccadilly Circus, as in a thousand historic scenes, men uncovered their heads. To prolong the reverence of these moments, to make men live in the strength of them, should be his appointed task, the task of his faith and his vision. It was for a faith, a message, a seer, that the soul of the multitude waited. And the day would come. . . . The message would be found and delivered, accepted and understood, and the labour of the travailing generations end. The faces on the pavement faded ; the mist of London lifted for the breaking of the day—the perfect day when to man would come the kingdom and the power and the glory. . . .

II

But the perfect day was not yet. Perfection was not the mark of those unquiet autumn months. To Hepworth's high expectations, as to those of most other people, peace had brought disillusionment. But he was slow to irony, slow to cynicism, and his confidence in the beautiful word "Reconstruction" had survived the first year of peace. Nevertheless, a storm of new perceptions had changed the air of his political and intellectual life. The old convictions had kept their clearness, but they stood no longer for the points it seemed most important to make for. A democratic ideal had always had a place in his message. But from the more practical exponents of his faith he had gradually become estranged. All through the War he had been obsessed by the dangers of pacificism. With persons inclined to this heresy he had fought so many battles in both his public and his private life that the War had been for him almost as much a war against untimely peacemakers as a war against the Central Powers. The Imperialism of the political party, for whom he had worked before the War, had not been quite of his colour. And estrangement is an estranging thing. The estranged may take to seeing differently even the interests they have in common. Since the War his fear of pacificism had been replaced by a fear of anarchy. He was alarmed by the political turmoil, and still more by the moral chaos, of the world he saw about him. His own nature was not unadventurous, and he had attempted many voyages of discovery himself; but it shocked him to see men recklessly tossing into a tumultuous sea the old securities of chart and compass. He was not for putting back, but he held that the newer the course you steered, the greater your need of navigation. Even the

Promised Land could not be made unless the crew maintained its discipline.

But Hepworth's faith held good. Forces of disintegration had been at work before, and in the end had not prevailed. Whatever else man might do without, he could not dispense with law and order. And by thinking as he did in terms of mankind and humanity he obtained a distinction that helped him. The people who said the things that disturbed him most spoke not for mankind at large, but for a group of irresponsible intellectuals. He still thought of his own generation as young, so full of vigour were his own forty years. He had missed the importance, almost the presence, of a generation much younger than his. He did not know that there were fresh young minds for whom his language was almost obsolete. The mankind to whom his thought went back, in whom he put his trust, to whom he looked for the real response to his message, was symbolised for him by that reverent and remembering multitude, who had stood bareheaded in the mist.

III

With the multitude, however, Hepworth, that autumn, had not much more to do than with the unknown younger generation. His political activities were restricted. His heart was as much in the old democratic right place as ever, and he never intended to do more than talk a little plain commonsense. But by sensitive ears his commonsense was sometimes mistaken for reaction, and the guardians of the political platforms, on which he had spoken before the War, did not renew the old invitations.

His work lay among his own people ; and he desired a much wider field. His vitality called for the big occasion, the sweep of some great popular cause ; he had no liking for sects, but held that a Church should be national. Until, however, the larger occasion came, he made the most of the occasion he had.

The hall, in which his present services were being held, stood a little off the Edgware Road, in a street which began with a cheerfulness borrowed from its strenuous neighbour, but betrayed itself, in its later unguarded course, as a street leading to a slum. The hall was not visible from the pavement ; you reached it by a forbidding rather well-like passage, into which, however, a notice board with a pointing hand afforded some encouragement to penetrate. When you emerged from the passage, the main entrance of the building faced you across a strip of well-kept gravel. A gravel path ran all round the building. Before Hepworth's occupation of them, the premises, of which the hall was the main feature, had been used for various purposes : as a gymnasium, as a drill hall, as the warehouse of a shop in the Edgware Road, as a place for the holding of services announced, on the board of that day, as of an

evangelistic and helpful kind. Hepworth had relieved the red brick building of most of its original dinginess ; it now offered an almost smiling face to the buildings that hemmed it in. Ivy had begun to climb the clean well-pointed walls ; the ironwork of the lamp above the door had been bought by him in Florence ; the windows of the vestibule showed resistance to the smoke of the surrounding chimneys. The gravel path was edged with a thin black line of earth, in which, if things very seldom flowered, they at all events tried to grow.

The various adaptations that the premises had undergone had made them admirable for Hepworth's purpose. The vestibule, into which the main door opened, was a passage that crossed the breadth of the building. From it two double swing doors with panes of glass gave entrance to the hall itself. It had the look of a place of worship. The roof was pointed and raftered and crossed by beams, from which, where once had hung the gymnasium ropes, now hung in their gold and blue the chandeliers of the electric light. The rows of rush-seated chairs, with a central aisle, suggested the forms of worshippers. Hepworth had panelled the distempered walls to the height of the window sills, and against the wall furthest from the vestibule stood a long spacious pulpit approached by two curving flights of stairs. Near the pulpit a door in the panelling, which on this wall was covered with a curtain, admitted to a second passage, narrower than the vestibule, that also crossed the breadth of the building. From it opened four doors. One belonged to a room which Hepworth kept for himself ; another to the room of his secretary ; a third to a bathroom, provided with many conveniences ; the fourth to a chamber, half storeroom, half kitchen, where a multitude of things were kept, and where the kettles were boiled on the occasion of social teas.

The two Sunday services stood for only a small portion of the time that Hepworth devoted to the hall. Saturdays excepted, he came there almost every day, at least for an

nour or two. Often he came in the morning and stayed on till late in the afternoon, having lunch in the Edgware Road. The room he had reserved for himself was not small, but it was very dim. The books, the pictures, the screen across the door, the rugs on the matting, the very comfortable chair by the gas fire in the grate, made the room habitable enough ; but the sun never shone through the frosted glass of the windows except in reflection from the windows of the houses outside. There were few days in the year when Hepworth did not burn electric light.

But the room always drew him. There was no place where he was quite so happy. He was curiously sensitive to the things about him, and curiously indifferent to them. He always gathered things that were pleasant and often gathered things that were beautiful ; but there was nothing—no picture, no book, no old friend of a treasure—with which it would have cost him very much to part. He enjoyed his library at home where much good work was done, but here, with the hall itself just across the passage, he was, so to speak, at the heart of it. He liked the sense the place gave him of being within reach of things, ready for whatever turned up : ready for people who called, ready for any summons that came. Far down at the back of his mind he cherished an irrational hope that one of these days a summons of real importance might come—a summons from the larger world.

Moreover, Hepworth had a further deep source of satisfaction. In the room next to his—there was a door between the two rooms—was another ardent and strenuous worker : one who was at once a disciple, and a fellow-labourer in the vineyard, a fellow-bearer of the torch, a loyal and kindred spirit. His secretary, a lively and gifted young man, happened to be all these things. Hepworth, who in the matter of people's gifts had a discerning eye, and in the matter of young men had secured some considerable finds, had recognised Beale's possibilities, and had given him the chance to develop them. Beale had been

a clerk at Somerset House—but a clerk working for his London Matric. Hepworth had released him from Somerset House, and had set him to much more congenial work at an institution a few doors off. The course at King's College had been followed by a course at the School of Economics, these years of preparation having been made easy for him by Hepworth's generous allowance.

Hepworth had his reward. Beale gave him a good deal more than the value of his work as secretary. As secretary, he had many demands to meet. Over and above the sending out of notices, the keeping of accounts, the claiming of subscriptions, the supervision of the caretaker, responsibility for the many grave little matters which as items in the Annual Balance Sheet meant so little to the members, but meant so much to him : over and above all this, there was the obligation to maintain amiable and sympathetic relations with those who were within the fold, and to answer the inquiries of the casual and curious strangers who approached him after every service. He also assisted Hepworth to edit his monthly paper, and sometimes took Hepworth's place in the pulpit. All these things he did with the precision of an excellent head, and a tact and wisdom almost precocious in a man of twenty-nine years. But he gave Hepworth a good deal more. He gave him, if not the thing he needed most, the thing he found it most difficult to obtain. He gave Hepworth companionship.

IV

The last pretence of daylight that the December afternoon could afford had faded from the dreary windows. Beale, who always came to Hepworth's room at tea time, looked up from the manuscript which Hepworth had asked him to read.

"The kettle boils," he said.

Hepworth, who was correcting a proof at his bureau, rushed to the rescue of the kettle. It boiled over before he reached it.

Hepworth boiled over, too. "It's too bad!" he exclaimed. "The moment I turn my head—"

"I thought," said Beale tranquilly, "you had eyes too at the back of it."

"Like the Beast in Revelation, you mean?"

"Oh, it's not so bad as all that! I did offer to make tea for you."

Hepworth relented. "It is not a rite for the novice," he said. As he poured the water into the teapot, his eye fell on the tray. "Where on earth is my cake!" he cried. "I put it on the tray. You saw I brought a cake?"

"I saw," Beale cautiously corrected, "that you brought a parcel."

"What on earth has become of it!" And Hepworth began to scatter the smaller objects in his neighbourhood.

Beale looked about him. "I see your hat on the other side of the typewriter. Possibly it suggests . . ."

Hepworth rushed to the typewriter. The parcel was covered by the hat. He smiled. "You have some intelligence," he said.

"I have some weakness for Barkham's cakes."

"Yes, I remembered that. I have got another like the one we had the other day."

Hepworth poured out tea. He gave Beale his cup, and settled himself very comfortably in the big leathern arm chair by the

fire. He had done what he could for Beale's comfort, but Beale's younger energy preferred a sterner accommodation.

Comfort, however, was certainly the note of the moment. If the gas fire had no depth of romance or of mystery, at least it gave a genial warmth ; the colours in the rug before it glowed with a tempered brightness. The books on the shelves by the fireplace, and the pictures on the walls, made the suggestion of a study prevail over the suggestion of an office. The place had, too, its suggestion of romance. The only lighted and occupied room in a large, dark, empty building has always a suggestion of romance.

" Stone's article's not much good," Beale said. " I don't think we can use it."

" No, I don't think we can. I am sorry. I have asked Stone to come and see me. I am sure he is worth encouraging."

Beale was not so sure, but abstained from expressing his doubt. He knew Hepworth's gift of divination, and remembered what wells of living water, under what unpromising earth, Hepworth's magic rod had discovered. He remembered his own Somerset House. If Hepworth had discovered *him* ! . . .

" Stone has got hold of a good idea," he said, " but he's got his tail in his mouth, so to speak : he goes round and round like a kitten at play. But if we cut it down a bit— "

" See what you can do," Hepworth said. " I don't want to discourage him."

He poured out their next cups of tea.

" I have not told you," Beale said, " about the people who spoke to me on Sunday."

" They had been interested ? "

" Very much. One was a lady who has lost her son in the War. She said all sorts of fine things about you. She is very grateful for what you have done for her. I think she means to join us."

" I am glad. Do you know who she is ? "

" No. I only know her by sight. She has been coming here rather often. She looks very sad."

Hepworth was genuinely moved. " It's heartbreaking," he exclaimed, " to think of all these terrible griefs ! Here's a test if you like ! What can we do for people like these ? The Rationalism of the past broke down so completely."

" It was a bit too stoical ? "

" I should say a bit too unhuman. Who were the other people who spoke to you ? " he asked.

Beale smiled. " Oh, one was a Rationalist of quite the good old type. He attacked me for what he called our ' ritualism.' "

" He didn't like our music ? "

" He smelt Popery all round. He denounced us for ' creating an emotional atmosphere.' Clear thinking, he said, and more clear thinking, always clear thinking, was the one thing we needed."

" The lady," Hepworth said, " appears to need something more."

" There were two others—quite nice people, both of them. They belong to the Church of England. They seemed inclined to join us. I didn't discourage them, of course, but I hinted that it was rather our idea that people should stick to their own Church if they have the good fortune to have one."

" You were right," Hepworth said.

They were silent a moment or two.

" By the way," Beale asked, " have you seen Pemblestone lately ? "

" I rang him up just before you came in. He says they expect to begin building again early next year."

" It's time they did. You can do no good with a hall. No one knows what it stands for. You must have a church."

" And ours will look like a church," Hepworth added.

Beale held back a little. " The danger is, I suppose, that we may have overdone it a bit. People may think we are a trifle more Christian than we are."

" A fault on the right side," Hepworth said.

" Possibly. But a good many of our people—quite a lot, I know—rather shy at the spire."

" As the Puritans shied at the cross. They are wrong. A spire is one of the most beautiful things that Christian art has given us, and it would be a thousand pities to let it go."

" Yes, I think so, too. In any case," Beale added cheerfully, " we shall be seen if we are not heard."

" My joke, Beale," Hepworth said. " Cut the cake."

Hepworth himself came near to realising, in moments like these, what Beale's companionship meant to him. A companionship, with the ties of common work and a common conviction, gave him more than any friendship could give—any friendship, that is, in which these ties were wanting. He had a long list of friends, and a longer list still of acquaintances, and many of his friendships had been preserved in spite of wide differences of opinion. Any one, acquaintance or friend, could count on him to meet any genuine claim. But his mind moved habitually in and towards generalisations, and from an individual, whose ideas had no particular bearing on his own, his interest was inclined to wander. In truth, he had for the individual a kind of subtle and obscure reluctance. There was so sad a difference between what one found in the individual when one came to close quarters with him, and the attributes with which he could be endowed in a humane, but distant, contemplation!

Moreover, with Beale he could let himself go. With Beale, thanks to his age and his origin, the safety valve could be opened wide. Hepworth was no recluse. He was not even unsociable. He had his exuberant, his almost boyish side, and a companionship, in which he could let off steam, was one of his human needs. Beale, bright and alive, full of quickness and humour and comment, had enough independence of mind to keep Hepworth quite on his mettle—which was just what Hepworth enjoyed. With Beale, as with very few older men, and with no women at all, he could abound in any sense he pleased. Work in such conditions as these was not very different from play, and Hepworth did not enjoy the game the less because, well as Beale always played it, he knew his own to be the master hand.

V

Hepworth was alone.

When Beale had closed the outer door behind him, he went back to the bureau to finish the correction of his article.

The room was very quiet. The big blocks of houses that shut the building in shut the sounds of the city out. The gas fire gently purred ; the buttons of Hepworth's sleeve tapped the shelf of the bureau when he took up or put down his pen. Outside, on the path beneath the windows, rain fell softly on the gravel.

The quiet of the room, deep as it was, was the quiet of a stilled publicity. It was the quiet of a private room in a place essentially public. No sound might come from the dark hall across the passage, but there came, so to speak, the sense of its being there : the sense of its meaning, the sense of its use, the sense of it as the scene of observances open to every passer-by. It was in this hall that his life was lived with most vividness, that he attained the most genuine expression of himself. It was to men and women as members of a public, and more particularly as members of a congregation, that he felt himself most near. The words he said from his pulpit to the listening faces in the rows of rush-seated chairs were words that he lived his whole life to utter. The quiet of the room was a silence in which lay buried an intensity of exultant living.

The article proved difficult to correct. On taking it up again, after his talk with Beale, he had a different impression of it. The sentences ran with a different rhythm. A good many of them did not run ; the rhythm of those that did seemed commonplace. He discovered a flatness in every statement he had made. He left the galleyslip dangling

from the shelf of the bureau, and returned to his big arm-chair. He had not enjoyed its comfortable depths many minutes when he heard a knock on the door of the passage.

The hour was late for a visitor, and the person he found on his doorstep, in the darkness and the rain, was not a visitor he at all expected. The person was Anne Burrows.

In the light of the passage he saw that she was very wet.

"Come in, come in, do," he said. "Why, you have no umbrella! And I have always thought you such a prudent person!"

Anne explained that she had walked no further than from the Marble Arch Tube station, and said she was not very wet. Hepworth, however, perceived that this was not true, and insisted on the removal of her cloak.

When he saw her in the better light of his own room, he was considerably startled. It was not the Miss Burrows he knew. She was the woman member of his committee whom he valued most, but the signs of her intelligence, her responsibility, her self-reliance, her quietness, had altogether disappeared; she looked frightened, almost haunted, a woman clearly unnerved. There was an emergency he would have to meet. And the first thing to be done was to try to give Anne time. He seized on the pretext of tea. Once more he replaced the kettle on the ring, and collected the cups and saucers and plates which had been left among his books and papers. He carried the tray to the storeroom, and brought back a clean cup and saucer for Anne. He took care that she obtained no opening until she had drunk her first cup of tea. When she had, he quietly waited.

"I am in great trouble," she said.

He still waited.

"I have had a great shock this afternoon."

"Please tell me," he said.

"It is about my nephew. I heard just before I left Blythe Road. Miss Priestman sent Mr. Hemmings to catch me. She's not well, and has not been to the bank to-day."

"Mr. Hemmings?"

"He comes from Hollingshed and Dixon, the big shop in Oxford Street. Charlie works there. He has been with them nearly five years."

"Mr. Hemmings brought you bad news?"

"Charlie has not been near them for a week."

"He is ill?"

"We do not know."

"There is nothing—nothing wrong at the shop, I hope?"

"Oh, no. Mr. Hemmings spoke very highly of him. But as Charlie has not been there since Thursday, and has not let them know, they sent Mr. Hemmings to see. The landlady where Charlie lives told him she has not seen Charlie since Thursday either."

"He has moved?"

"No. I have just come from there. All his things are just as he left them. He came home from business about half-past six on Thursday; went up to his room; and then went out again. He has his evening meal out. He did not appear at breakfast—he and another young man have their breakfast with Mrs. Eames and her husband; and when she went to do his room, she found the bed had not been slept in, and the suit he goes to business in was hanging across the rail. The room was quite tidy, she said, except that he had used the basin to wash his hands."

"He had taken nothing at all?"

"Nothing, so far as I could discover. The things on the washstand—his sponge and shaving things—seemed to be just as he left them."

"And this was a week ago?"

"Yes, this day week."

"And do you mean to say that the woman has allowed him to disappear like this, for a whole week, without letting any one know? Why didn't she tell some of you—you or his family or some one? Where does his family live?"

Anne hesitated. "My brother is dead," she explained.

" Charlie is my brother's son. It is a sad story. My sister-in-law left my brother a good many years ago. I am the only other relative Charlie has."

" Then why didn't the woman come to you ? It was she who gave Mr. Hemmings your address ? "

" Not exactly. Mr. Hemmings saw it on an envelope on the chimney-piece. Charlie sent me some photographs to choose from some time ago, and took them back in the same envelope. Mrs. Eames knew, of course, that I lived somewhere at Hampstead."

" But why on earth didn't she let *some one* know ? "

" She seems not to have thought it necessary."

Hepworth considered. " Is there anything—*she* knows ? "

" No, she can't account for his absence in any way. But she appears not to have been seriously alarmed."

" But why ? Surely, it's most alarming ? "

" Yes, I think it is. I am terribly frightened and anxious. But I must confess it did seem different when I was talking to Mrs. Eames."

" In what way different, do you mean ? "

" I did not like her much ; I don't think she's a nice kind of woman : but she has evidently had experience. She has had a good deal to do with young men."

" Her lodgers have been young men ? "

" Yes—and I should say not a good class."

" But your nephew ? "

Anne drew back a little. " We have always thought he was steady, and Mr. Hemmings says he bore an excellent character with them. He was doing very well, in fact. He was in the silks—and one of the best of their younger salesmen."

" Perhaps you had better tell me what Mrs. Eames did say."

Anne faced it. " It has often happened," she said, " that he has not come home at night."

" I see."

" But he has always appeared for breakfast next morning, and changed before going to business."

Hepworth took it in. "But this will hardly account, will it, for an absence of a whole week?"

"No, I don't think it accounts myself, and she doesn't think so now. She sees that she ought to have let some one know. But she certainly did tell me some very strange things. One does not realise what a dreadful place London is until one has an experience like this. But somehow she made up her mind that he would come back, and she didn't want to make trouble."

"But he has not come back. . . . Did you ask her whether he has seemed at all depressed? Was he in *any* kind of trouble?"

"It was one of the first things I asked her. She said, No. He was in quite good spirits at breakfast on Thursday, and she heard him whistling when he went to his room."

"In that case, it is improbable—"

"No," Anne said, "I am sure he would not do that."

They were silent for a moment or two. Hepworth sought among the grim alternatives that presented themselves for the one that looked least grim. "Loss of memory is one of the most probable explanations in a case like this, I think. A friend of mine lost his memory some years ago, quite suddenly, when he was spending the day in town. He took no harm—though he had some strange adventures. He was found with the help of the police."

"The police!"

"Yes," he said, "I am afraid we shall have to go to them."

Anne made no reply. She could not control her tears.

Hepworth waited very gently. Persons in trouble often came to him, and experience had increased the tact of his natural kindness and consideration. Sensitive and emotional himself, he was not made awkward, as most men are, by the less restrained expressions of distress. Moreover, emergencies, and particularly sudden emergencies, had an attraction for him. He liked the need for a quick decision.

The relief of her tears, when she had begun to recover,

produced a change in Anne. Her fear lost the blindness of panic. The strain relaxed just enough for her attention to be diverted a little—for her to see and to feel where she was. The room was familiar to her, for it was here that the monthly meetings of the committee were held, and she had served on the committee for years. But she was conscious somehow of something more than the room's familiarity—or rather perhaps something different; she was conscious of a strangeness in her finding it so natural to be there. That she should be sitting alone with Hepworth, with the room so deeply quiet, talking to him, confiding in him, depending on him in an hour of urgent need, appeared to her extraordinarily natural. She did not feel it was an experience she had had before, but did feel it was one of which she had had some kind of prevision. It had about it a curious sense of fulfilment. To be alone with him in the intimacy of this deep quiet, with the bond of a shared anxiety between them, was it not like the coming true of some secret hope—of a wish buried so deep as to be almost unknown, or at all events quite unacknowledged?

When he saw that Anne was more herself, Hepworth returned to the matter in hand. He proposed that they should go to the police at once—he would, of course, go with her. He telephoned to Susan that she was not to let dinner wait.

He gathered the last of the tea things on the tray; turned the gas fire out; put up the shelf of the bureau; and having opened the door for Anne, switched off the light of his room. In the passage he helped her on with her cloak.

"We must go out by the main entrance," he said. "I came in that way, and left my umbrella in the vestibule." He opened the door of the hall, and turned on a light near the door. "If you will go through, and switch on a light at the other end, I will put out this."

Anne passed down the aisle between the rush-seated chairs, and made her way to the switchboard. She sometimes acted as steward, and understood the working of the

lights. Just as he turned his own light out, Hepworth called to her, " One moment. I have forgotten some notes. I will not keep you a minute." And he stepped back into the passage.

Anne waited.

Several minutes went by, and Anne, who was tired, sat down.

She found she was glad to wait.

To any one, who was not familiar with it, the hall, in the dimness of the one light above Anne's head, would have seemed a rather ghostly place. The obscurity, in which the aisle began, soon passed into very deep shadow ; the curtain on the wall at the other end could hardly be distinguished from the panelling. Above the beams, from which hung the chandeliers, there was nothing but a vault of darkness. But Anne, who in her shrinking from what lay before her was clinging to these passing moments in rather a desperate way, found herself clinging, too, to this familiar scene as to a place of refuge and a sanctuary. She had always known that she loved it, but had never known how much ! She had often seen it silent and empty and dim, but its silence had never said so much to her. It seemed for a moment or two as if she were really listening. It was almost as if she had only to sit quite still, and there would be things she would really hear. She was able to feel a beneficence in any kind of place of worship, but, now, she appeared to feel something more. The place seemed touched with mystery. She could give many reasons for those acts of worship in which she had taken part for years ; but now it was as if the silence were trying to convey to her that behind the last reason she could give there lay a last incommunicable reason.

Then her fears and anxieties rushed back. The shock and the strain, the suddenness and the violence of the catastrophe, the terrible possibilities in the young man's fate, her talk with that dreadful woman who had given her a glimpse of a London she did not know, of an underworld

of shameful and sinister transgression—all this came back, and with it the bewilderment of a lurid and violent contrast : a contrast between the evil and terror of the world that lay beyond these quiet walls and the blessedness of the peace within them. It was as if she were living in two remote worlds at once, each an absolute denial of the other.

Hepworth reappeared at the door of the passage.

For an instant, as she saw him in the dimness of the other end, where his figure was not much more than a bar of deeper shadow, her awareness of him had an intimacy that made him seem curiously near. He was more actually there, nearer to her, nearer in some essential way, in the dimness, than he could ever be in the sundering light. The illusion was at once so subtle and so strong that as he came down the aisle and his form grew more definite in the lessening shadow, she had a poignant little sense of loss.

PART V

I

The people had melted away, and Susan stood for a moment or two in the middle of her drawing-room, where she had shaken hands with the last to go.

She almost seemed to be talking still. She had kept it up for more than two hours and a half, and she could not believe, for a moment or two, there was nothing more that she had to say. But the afternoon was over : the people—their faces, their voices, their dresses, their hats, their personalities with all the different lines they had obliged her to take—were gone, and she felt, in an absurd rather ungrown-up little way, that she was alone with nothing—nothing, that is, except herself and the space of the big empty room.

She went to the fireplace and rang the bell. No one else was likely to come, and she might as well have the room put straight. As she saw her face in the mirror above the chimney-piece, her expression made her smile. She had so much of her hostess look ! No one ever believed, of course, that her own guests could be bored, but Susan couldn't help thinking her afternoon had gone rather well. In any case, as the years went by, people did become easier to manage. Who knows ?—perhaps to be unhappy was really good for one's manners !

" Has your master come in ? " she asked the maid.

" No, mam, not yet."

" Oliver knows that we shall want the car at eight ? "

" Yes, mam. I gave the order myself."

Susan went to the window. Dinner was to be at seven that night, for John had taken stalls for a theatre, and Susan knew that she ought to go upstairs and dress. But she didn't feel ready to go upstairs. She wanted to stay a little longer just where it all had happened. She had liked it.

Didn't one enjoy doing anything which one believed one was doing well? It occurred to her that she might have been too hard on herself, and that John had been right after all: she might always have done these things rather better than she had supposed. And they had been interesting people. As on other afternoons of the kind, the talk had been all in snippets; she had had no proper talk with any one (though she hoped there had been no one with whom she had not talked. She hated the idea of any one's being forgotten). But they had been interesting people—friends of John's, friends from the old days with aunt Frances, friends of a later, more private acquisition of her own: and things they had said, with things she had said to them (a less welcome memory), kept, so to speak, jumping out at her. They jumped out, these things her friends had said, oddly mixed up with some of the things they had worn. She remembered two or three of the hats and dresses which she had especially liked, and considered their merits in the light of possible requirements of her own. But little by little, as she looked through the open window, she began to be conscious of the view. And little by little, as she renewed her familiarity with it, an idea, a sense of detachment, with which somehow the view was associated, took the place of her memories of the recent scene. She had often thought, when she had looked through this window before, that for all its interests, and all its opportunities, and all the gains that had come to her, the life she was living in London was not one to which she really belonged. She had strayed into it somehow by accident. Beyond it lay something else, something that mattered very much more. Was it the life of the affections? If George had not married, would she not have been quite content to go on living with him, and might she not have been even more than content? She had not been reluctant to marry, but now that she knew what marriage meant, she sometimes wondered whether she were not one of those women for whom happiness lay elsewhere.

Rain had fallen in the afternoon, and in the light of a

ragged and broken sky the distance was strangely clear. Susan could see across London to the hills on the other side. It was not one of the lights that she liked best. It made London seem small tc be able to see across it like this. It made London seem unimportant. Certainly, it spoilt the romance. For the romance of London was like the romance of the sea :—there was no " other side " to the sea !

The grass of the lawn was below the window, and on the pergola, which covered the path beside the lawn, the roses would soon be out. Beyond the garden was the field in which they were building John's church. She could see the scaffolding of the west end behind the side branches of the elm. A feeling came to her that there was something she seemed to miss. For a moment or two she could not think what it was. Then she suddenly remembered. Work was over for the day, and what she missed was the panting of the engine in one of the contractor's sheds. For the last three months, since work on the church had been resumed, the engine could usually be heard when the windows on this side of the house were open.

Susan turned away. The progress of the building had a real interest for her, but it was not of the church that she cared to think just then.

II

There was plenty of light in the road outside, where the wet of a recent shower gleamed on the iron chain which hung with a kind of festoon-like droop between the low posts that carried it, marking as private the space of gravel between the pavement and the house. The chain as a symbol of privacy had replaced the paling or hedge before many small drives in the neighbourhood. But the evening was sombre, the room was dark, and Susan, excited still from her afternoon, felt that to see the glass and flowers on the fine polish of her table was rather a thing she needed.

"Shall we have the light?" she asked.

John consented, and the maid switched on the lamps within the silk shade above the table.

"That's better," Susan said.

She felt, too, a need to talk. She was not tired from having talked so much already, but felt in the humour to go on. She had heard many interesting things—little odds and ends of gossip—opinions of books and plays. There had been one or two people whom John knew better than she, and she wanted to ask him about them. There had been two or three people of whom she had received new impressions: one, a person who had lately married, and who had indicated the change in her state by a startling change in her raiment. She had become the wife of a rather dreary professor of something, and had seemed to wish her clothes to convey a clear suggestion that she hadn't. There had been, too, a slightly unexpected Mrs. Jefferson, about whom, probably, John would be glad to hear. She wanted to talk, and one forgot now and then that John was John, or had to pretend that he wasn't. Could one live with any one without such assumptions as these? There were not

many people like George, on whose interest one could always count—to whom, so to speak, one could talk without thinking about it. Moreover, there were several Johns, and it was not so bad when he happened to be the right one. He had his perceptions, he often knew what you meant. He had his sense of fun, and the professor's wife would amuse him. Furthermore, the success of her afternoon was behind her, and any little consciousness of success, however small it might be, tended to help her with John. It was not that he was impressed by it, but that to feel she had done fairly well on her own ground, in things that were essentially hers, served to lessen the sense of disadvantage with which she always met him on his.

But, as it happened, John that evening was too much John for her innocent little game to be played. To the outward eye he offered no discord to the scene. He did not look prophetic ; the dinner jacket he wore in no way recalled his mantle. His enterprise near the Edgware Road appeared to be a long way off. He had a well-groomed, evening look, and the things on the table—the prettier for the contrast of the lamplight with the sombre evening outside—seemed quite to accept his ownership. To-night the room—a little too modern, she sometimes thought, in its conscious rejection of the modern, its over-anxious recovery of the past—was restful with a shadowy richness ; a dimness, as of dusk, came through the Georgian windows with their small, clear, oblong panes ; the sideboard, with its witness to spacious feasts, showed chiefly by the gleam of silver and the whiteness of the drawn-linen cloth ; the fireplace yielded something of its dignity—its depth was genuinely antique—to the homely shadows on the hearth. John, massive and masterful, with his strong refined face and rather inscrutable eye, looked a man quite able to compass an admirable setting if he chose. It had been nice of him to think of the theatre, and thoughts of this kind came to John fairly often.

But like most emotional people, John was subject to

moods, and the mood he disclosed, as the dinner went on, was one she especially disliked. One after another the things she told him fell with an increasing flatness, or were received with an edge of comment that verged on the suspicion of a snub. Usually, she acquiesced. When he was like this, she let him alone, waited for a pleasanter mood. It is bad-tempered people who complain most of bad temper in others, and Susan's temper was generally good. His best moods meant so little to her that she was seldom much disturbed by his bad. She had moved so far from him in the course of the last two years that she could see certain aspects of his character with a kind of distant unconcern. In any case, a life of constant hostilities, or even constant pricks of the pin, was a misery she could not contemplate. But to-night, partly perhaps because she was a little excited, because the afternoon had left her with the impulses of a quickened vitality, she did not feel inclined to acquiesce. There was no reason why he should not be interested—certainly, none why she should be snubbed. The friends she had talked to an hour ago had been perpectly intelligent people, and she had got on with them perfectly well. She resented his attitude as acutely as she disliked his manner. In the course of the last two years his manner to her had changed. His sensitiveness to her perceptions had lost its edge, and he put less often on the brusqueness of his tone the restraint that had always irked him. His mother, she remembered, had a delicacy, a quietness, a gentle precision of speech, often possessed by the members of a faith that peculiarly favours good breeding ; but Susan suspected her son of reverting at times to one of the dour North Country types. Her slumbering antagonism awoke. If she could not lift from off her—as she knew she never could—the unbearable weight his personality imposed, she must try at least for a moment's ease by some small change of position.

Instead, therefore, of "going silent," as was her way

when she found him more than usually tiresome and oppressive, she made up her mind to go on.

"There was a Mrs. Jefferson here this afternoon," she said. "Do you know anything of her?"

John shook his head. "No."

"I thought perhaps you might. She is evidently interested in the church."

John merely said, "Indeed."

"She asked a good many questions about it." Susan hesitated. To plunge into the deep waters of John's convictions, when he himself was not in the humour for the plunge, was a proceeding that took some nerve, and it occurred to her that dinner was not quite the happiest occasion for this rather hazardous enterprise. But to-night the unpleasantness of his mood provoked her to try to assert herself by any means within her reach. If he would not talk about *her* kind of thing, he must pay for it by having to talk about *his*. Some sort of recognition from him she felt she really must have. So she went on, "She wanted to know, among other things, whether you find people clever enough."

"Clever enough! What on earth did she mean?"

"To understand your ideas. Some of them are rather difficult, don't you think?"

"Would they be worth very much if they weren't?"

"I dare say not. But most of us are not very clever, you know, and those who are don't seem to care much about going to church."

"The fault lies with the Church," he said. "It fails to meet their needs."

"I am afraid we all need much the same thing."

"That is—?"

Susan was not quite sure how to put it. "To have a rest from religion altogether. We don't know what we believe or don't believe, and we want to be let alone till we do."

"This was Mrs. Jefferson's line?"

"No," Susan laughed, "it's mine!"

" I am not impressed."

" I hardly expected you would be. But, honestly, John," she continued, " isn't it rather difficult to say just what religion really does for people ? So many nice people have no religion to speak of, and so many religious people are horrid. And, of course, it's often the other way round. I should say that if you are religious, you are religious, however horrid you may be. Just as if a man is a gentleman, he is a gentleman, whatever ungentlemanly things he does. What people really want is the thrill."

" The *what* ? "

" Oh, I know that's not the right word to use. The romance, I mean, the chance of being taken out of themselves, out of the world they live in, and up into a world of far more beauty. Don't art and religion give you much the same things ? You may get as much good from a concert as you get from going to church."

" If this is true at all—which I doubt," John said, " it is true only of a handful of musical people. The mass of the community is much less unwilling to go to church than it is to go to concerts—if the music is in the least worth hearing. For every concert hall in the country there must be a hundred places of worship. Art would be a poor substitute for religion," he added, " with a people whose taste was at the level of ours."

Susan drew in. She had had her fling, her need of assertion was satisfied. She had said these things because she had rather lost her temper. And seeing how much more these matters meant to John than they meant to her, the attack looked a trifle mean.

John was always generous. He was a great fighter, but she had never known him retaliate. And, for herself, hadn't he left her perfectly free ? He had never tried to impose his opinions upon her, nor, except in a legitimate way, had he tried to influence hers. How many men, with convictions as ardent as his, would have shown the same forbearance ? There was something big about John, something beautifully

free from pettiness. She wished to be fair to him, she tried to be fair, but—but all this was not what she wanted. What she really wanted was some one who would see her points : some one less learned, less well-armed and equipped, less of an authority and an expert, less generally tremendous all round : some one, above all, who was less tremendously certain. It was all very well, but no one nowadays had the right to be so certain as this ! Muddleheadedness was a sin against which one had to be on one's guard ; but she did prefer people whose knowledge had a few more gaps, whose minds had a few loose ends. She did prefer people on whom you could make some kind of impression. John was like a great immovable mountain. You made no more impression on him than you would make on a mountain side by scratching a few rocks with a penknife. And, after all, his tolerance came from indifference. What you thought and said would have mattered to him more if you had mattered more yourself. It was a depressing thing, a desolate thing, to have to live with a mountainous mind.

" I expect you are right," she said. " A good deal of nonsense is talked about art, and what it's supposed to do for us."

" I think it is to the presuppositions of religious experience," he said, " that art owes its finest quality."

Susan let the question drop. She was thinking—and the thought had come to her before—how tired she was of John's voice. It was a pleasant voice, and the feeling was quite unreasonable : but she couldn't help it—she was ! She remembered something she had once read in some French novel or other. If one cared for a person, the author said, one was always giving oneself new reasons for caring still more. If one did not care, new reasons for caring still less. It was true. There was a kind of deadliness in the way one gave oneself new reasons. It was as if some malevolent power were at work within one, making one, in spite of oneself, against one's will, discover things one could turn against him—against the person for whom one did not care.

She recoiled. In common decency, one couldn't give way to feelings like these.

She looked for a change of subject, and when she had found it, she made a change in her manner, too. " I forgot to tell you just now," she said. " I heard from Elsie Holmes this afternoon. I read her letter when I was changing my dress."

Hepworth, to whom the discussion had meant more than Susan knew, and who, though not less tolerant than she supposed, still had a human desire to make some impression too, perceived in this easy transition of hers that trait of elusiveness to which in Susan, as in other women, he found it difficult to be reconciled.

" You have not heard lately," he said.

" No—not since the last time I went to see her. She has some interesting news."

" What is it ? "

" She is going to be married next month."

John's interest awoke. Several considerations presented themselves to his mind. " Has she told the man about Bertie ? Does he know it's Bertie's child ? "

Susan shrank from the questions : she did not like their tone. But she did not let her manner change. " Yes—and he has been very nice about it. She seems very happy. It is so much the best thing that could happen. Poor Bertie! He would have been very glad, don't you think ? "

Hepworth considered. " At least, her position will be assured," he said.

" And Kitty's."

" That will depend, I think. Her future is likely to be a difficult problem."

" Oh, well, she's not quite two ! One needn't worry too much at present."

" The problem is there all the same. I am afraid it will always be there. A handicap of this kind is a difficult thing to get over."

" No, John," Susan protested, " don't say that ! " To

which she added, irrelevantly, " Kitty is such a dear ! " To which, again, she added, more irrelevantly still, " Her eyes are just the colour of Bertie's."

Hepworth felt a deep distaste. He had kept his promise of that Saturday night, and when Bertie had fallen in one of the last actions of the War, he had told Susan the story. He had further kept faith with Bertie by encouraging Susan to go and see Elsie and the child, and had helped Susan in what she had been able to do for them. But his dislike of the incident, his moral repugnance to it, had not in any way weakened. Bertie had been too true a prophet. He had foretold the interest Susan would take in the child, and might even have foreseen the affection she would come to feel for it. Over the child they seemed, in spirit, Bertie and Susan, to be brought together again—to be linked once more in that common understanding of theirs in which he could never share.

He was silent. Susan, hurt by his unresponsiveness, found the antagonism that she had tried to resist revive. " I always feel," she said, " that you never really liked Bertie."

Hepworth, conscious too of antagonism, was taken a little off his guard. " I certainly did not like this episode in his career."

Susan's antagonism changed to bitterness. " I think he behaved very well. He provided for Kitty ; and Elsie, who is the only person who has any right to reproach him, has never said one word. I don't think you really like any of us."

John had become too angry for denial. " I think there are great differences in our points of view."

" Thank goodness there are ! " Susan said.

And yet, a few minutes later, when she was in her room, putting on her cloak for the play, the story of that Saturday evening came back to her, and she remembered why it was that John had come down to Hildon Place

III

The shops in the Finchley Road had drawn their blinds, for their doors had long been closed, and the general emptiness, through which the car took its course, gave Susan every chance to feel the melancholy of the cold light evening of May. The sky had settled for the night to a low and uniform leadenness ; the roadway was black with the wet of the latest shower, but the pavements, which were drying more quickly, were only brown and discoloured. When the car ran into Avenue Road, to which the trees on each side gave a tunnel-like effect of leafy gloom, the people on foot became so few, and looked so dusky and so dim, that they hardly counted as real people at all ; they were like mere phantoms of dreariness, whose only purpose it could be to haunt damp and deserted pavements. The windows of the car were raised, but Susan, whose dress was thin and whose head uncovered, drew her cloak more warmly about her.

She was haunted by the memory of her scene with John as the pavements were haunted by the phantoms. This seemed, too, to be in a sense unreal. There could be no doubt that it had really happened ; but a life in which such scenes could happen, in which she could play a part so foreign to her nature, appeared too improbable to be real. It might be safer, perhaps, not to make too sure of one's nature ; few of us know the parts we are capable of playing until we have actually played them : but there came to her little glimpses and flashes of herself in other scenes, with other people, and she could find nothing to foreshadow the hour she had just had with John. She could think of no one among either the people she had met and known, or the people she had lived with and loved, towards whom she

had felt anything like this kind of deep antagonism—an antagonism, on which, so to speak, at any small provocation, she was ready to lay her hand, as, in the days when such things were worn, a man might finger the hilt of some secret weapon he carried. There were intervals, of course, hours of good temper and good sense, when one lived as other people live, when one thought about other things, when one was occupied and interested and forgot ; even the fiercest of men in the fierce old days could not have fingered his weapon all the time : but to-night she saw that the provocations were becoming more frequent just because it took smaller and smaller things to provide them. That malevolent power within her, that did its work against her will, found justifications for the way she felt with a quite horrible persistence and ingenuity. It seemed to be constantly supplying her with mean little pretexts for dislike. She felt how mean they were, she felt her meanness in using them. One owed it to oneself—to say nothing of *them*—to try to think decently of people as well as behave to them decently. Moreover, John meant well—that was as obvious as anything could be. He always meant to be good to her, and in truth he usually was. The impression too he had made in the earlier days had by no means worn away. He belonged to a world of big things. She told herself this, told it as often as she could, and still. . . .

After passing the Zoo and Regent's Park, where the gay spring trees and shrubs dripped and drooped like the decorations of an abandoned festival, the car came to livelier scenes, where there were more people on the pavements, and the pleasure traffic of taxis and private cars, in which Susan saw other women with uncovered heads, with cloaks over evening dresses, began the spectacle of the London night. She felt the first lifting of her load. She was glad to see the cars and the people, glad to be among them again, and the first motor bus they passed had the face of a homely old friend. In Regent Street the people on the pavement thickened to a meagre stream, and

lighted windows of closed shops made splashes of brilliance against the soiled drab persistence of the daylight, as the gowns of the women in the cars made gleams of gaiety against the daytime burdens of the buses. Susan found her oppression grow lighter. Something in the look of the street, of the people, the traffic, the shop windows, something in the bare fact of being there, brought a sense of escape and relief. They were free, these people, beautifully, splendidly free ; free to take their own course, go their own way ; no one could dominate them, no one subject them to his will. You couldn't think of them as believers in this or believers in that, you could think of them only as people. Probably, you would find, if you could get to know them, that they were just as pagan as you ; probably, indeed, they were more pagan still, for London at night looks wicked. How surprised one of those figures would be if you stopped him and asked, quite suddenly, what he thought about going to church. It all seemed to stand, the shops and the people and the traffic, the whole life of the London night, for an immense indifference, an immense rejection, an immense refusal to let any one—John or any one else—impose his ideas upon it. And could anything, in fact, be more entirely useless than to try !

Then—something within her gave way. She saw her cynicism as nothing more than another of those malevolent tricks which that power was constantly playing her. And she just couldn't stand any more of it ! It was altogether too utterly hateful ! She couldn't stand her own horridness —for that was what it really came to. She must find something, do something, say something, to break the malevolent spell. She was wrong, she was sorry, quite horribly sorry, and she felt an uncontrollable impulse to tell him.

But they were now in the middle of Piccadilly Circus, with its electric signs and big islands and its crossing traffic, and she had only a moment or two left. So she said quickly, and as simply as she could,

" I am sorry, John, I was so cross just now."

He turned to her. It was evident that he had heard what she said, but his expression was a little vacant. " Cross ? " he repeated.

He had forgotten already !

IV

Susan unfastened her cloak, and arranged it, with John's assistance, over the back of her stall. As their seats were in the middle of their row, no one was likely to pass them, and she could settle herself for the evening comfortably : their row was the third from the stage, and only a few yards from her the back of the conductor, who had just taken his place, rose black and conspicuous above the curtained enclosure by which the musicians were protected from the public view. Above the dark line of the footlights the fire-proof curtain made its slow and laborious rise, but gay as the balconies looked with their triplets of tinted lamps, like bunches of luminous fruit, the curtain that hid the stage remained for the present in shadow. She could see dust and little worn places in the creases of its majestic folds.

She glanced at her programme, and then let it lie in her lap. Like other people who love the theatre, she loved the moments before the play began. She knew the expectation and the magic of that charged and enchanted place. She had gathered from what some one that afternoon had said that their piece was not among the best then running : but with the darkened curtain before her, to say nothing of the conductor's back, the thrill of the old expectation prevailed.

In the meantime, she had the people to look at. They passed before her, between the brass rail of the curtained enclosure and the front row of the stalls, to reach seats on the further side. There was one point common to them all : they were not the people of former days—not even of the days before the War. They had an air of taking new liberties, of letting an old tradition go. The obligation to contribute to the general impression failed of the old observance. It seemed to her hasty judgment that nearly all the men

had pale cheeks and black hair, and noses of one nationality. Very few of the women were right : they were not women who ever could be ! She would have liked to be with some one whose attention could be drawn to one or two of the passing figures. But John did justice only to extreme instances—to young garments on old shoulders, or to shoulders, young or old, on which the garments were insufficient. He did not miss the people of former days, and would not have shared her regret if he had.

The baton of the conductor sank to rest, the lights were lowered, and at last the curtain rose.

Susan drew her cloak about her again, for a cold draught came from the stage.

The warning she had received was justified. The play was a work from one of our older hands, and adhered to the old conventions. It was not the kind of thing she wanted. Life was weighing upon her, and her mood just then was a mood not easy to amuse : she felt a need to see human people, with interests and a point of view that in some way resembled her own. The people on the stage looked like real people, and their talk seemed perfectly real, but their motives had been derived from epigrams. They were agreed, one and all, these people on the stage, that there was only one thing that a woman who was not happy with her husband could do, only one thing that she ever did—take a lover. And Susan, as she listened, remembered how many unhappy women she had known, and how few had taken lovers. Still, if anything could make you desire a lover, it would be a husband like the man in this piece. He was a stout middle-aged person with offensive manners, and an unpleasant red coil of stoutness that protruded above the back of his collar. The lover was a very attractive young man, with delightful manners, and certainly with no protuberances. The frock the heroine wore made Susan think of Gladys. All went well with the lovers until a moment came when the wife, remembering that her husband had begun in much the same way, doubted

whether the durability of the young man's love was being adequately proved by the immense duration of his kisses : a touch of cynicism, Susan felt, that shocked the audience almost as much as it shocked the lover. Presently, the curtain fell.

Susan looked once more at the people. John rose from his place and looked, too. And in a seat four rows behind them he saw Mr. Henry Hathaway, the husband of Susan's aunt Frances. He told the good news to Susan.

She was delighted. " Do bring him here," she said. " I should so love a talk."

" I will see what I can do," John said.

He caught uncle Henry's eye. Mr. Hathaway left his place, and joined John in the gangway. A moment later he took the seat by Susan's side.

" This is nice, uncle Henry," she said. " I do hope it will be a long interval."

" I have come for good," uncle Henry told her. " John suggested that he and I should change places. John is an excellent fellow."

Uncle Henry was a distinguished-looking old gentleman of seventy-six, spare and erect, with an air and a figure at once courtly and masculine, and the general mellowness of an experience that had been very markedly civilised. He had white hair, a small white pointed beard, and melancholy, penetrating eyes. John looked well, Susan thought, in his evening dress, but uncle Henry had a look as if he never wore anything else. His earlier years had been given to diplomacy, in which he was making for himself a career when, two years after his marriage, he had surprised and distressed his friends by a wilful retirement from the service. He had an unfailing graciousness of manner, which Susan, much as she liked it, always found a little pathetic : his manner seemed to belong to and to bring back the memory of that career in which he had missed his reward, as a decoration on the breast of an exiled courtier may recall the royal favour he has lost. On the other hand, the defect, whatever it was, which had kept uncle Henry from success,

was somehow, she fancied, a part of those qualities that made him so easy to love.

He turned in his stall, and took Susan in with a thoroughness that ended by making her smile.

"Well, uncle Henry?" she asked.

"You look charming, my dear. It's a pity the young woman, to whose indiscretions we have just been admitted" —he made a gesture towards the stage—"did not put herself in the hands of your dressmaker."

Susan laughed. "Oh, her frock was much more wonderful!"

"That was my reason," uncle Henry said, "for venturing to suggest your dressmaker."

But his eyes saw other things, Susan knew, than the success of this accomplished woman. It was an eye that had read many secrets in its time, and—it was Susan's conjecture—they had not always been the secrets of men. Uncle Henry never asked questions, and you felt that he had no need to. This, at least, had been her feeling for the last two years; she herself had not known enough, when she had lived with him and aunt Frances, to appreciate his fine penetration. It was her perception of the extent to which he was prepared for the way her marriage had gone that had enlightened her as to his gifts. In the old days they had merely been the best of friends, as in those days she had done no more than wonder why aunt Frances, who was so full of understanding and sympathy herself, made so little use of these rare possessions in her husband.

"Yes, John is an excellent fellow," he repeated.

"Oh, of course."

He laid his hand very gently on hers. "But excellent people, Sue, are not always the easiest to live with."

"Not always."

He took his hand away. "I know. You are at the beginning of your voyage, and I am near the end of mine, but we are in the same boat, my dear. We are in the same boat, though we sit at opposite ends of the table—if I may mix my metaphor a little."

Susan, who had sat for three years between uncle Henry and his wife at their table in Eaton Place, understood the metaphor, because of late she had come to understand the situation.

"It is hard on us," uncle Henry went on, "hard on us all. I do not forget your aunt, and you, perhaps, my dear, would do well to remember John. But, certainly, it is hard on you and me."

Susan did remember John, but was not quite sure of a need to remember aunt Frances. "Hasn't aunt Frances her public work?" she asked.

"No doubt. But I have always understood that it was I who drove her to it."

Susan laughed. "Were you so wicked, uncle Henry?"

"No, my dear, I was never wicked. Nothing worse than a *chargé d'affaires*."

"I think that sounds rather interesting."

"Yes, it was an interesting life. I was very sorry to leave the service." He looked at her. "I think, Sue, the life would have suited you."

"Me!"

"Ah, you have probably forgotten. You don't remember a young Dudeney—Edward Dudeney—the son of a colleague of mine—who came a good deal to our house in your time."

"Dudeney, Dudeney," Susan repeated. "Oh, I remember! A tall, dark young man, with rather a distinguished smile."

"If he had received a little encouragement, Sue—"

"Oh, the poor young man!" Susan laughed. "To think that I never knew! Do tell me about him. What is he doing now?"

The old man shook his head. "He's married, Sue."

"Oh, but that's disappointing! It would have been so nice of him not to! But what made you think that about him?"

"That he would have liked a little encouragement?"

"No—that he would have done better for me."

"My own sad experience, Sue, and the kind indulgence you always showed me. You were young—and you would not have been so indulgent to me, if you had been a believer."

"You are amusing, uncle Henry! You were always perfect to *me*."

"I was so grateful to you for not being a child of light."

"I suppose Mr.—what was his name?—Mr. Dudeney was not one either?"

"No, Sue. He belonged to my old profession."

"But aunt Frances. What did you mean about 'driving her to it'?"

"Oh yes, your aunt. She desired what she described in those days—I speak of many years ago—as a life of greater reality. She said—these were not her words—your aunt is a gentlewoman—we told too many lies."

"Did you, uncle Henry?"

"Whatever we did, my dear, we saved Europe from a good many wars. The present outcry against us does not impress me much. If the public wishes to be taken into our confidence, it must learn a little more geography. Not to mention a few other things."

"And did aunt Frances get her reality?"

"I am afraid she did. She had not made many speeches on public platforms before she gave up reproaching me. She discovered that in her line, as in mine, and as in all other lines, the truth must be tempered to the public."

"But surely aunt Frances—" Susan protested.

"Certainly, your aunt is a truthful woman. That is why she made the discovery so soon."

"You are cynical, uncle Henry!"

"It is hard on her," uncle Henry went on: "as hard on her as it is on me. I suppose I am the only person who knows."

"Knows?"

"That she made that unfortunate discovery. This is why I am the one person whom she ought never to have married."

At that moment the curtain rose.

"Oh, bother!" Susan said. "they are going to begin again. You are so much more interesting, uncle Henry."

"Thank you, my dear. You make me wish it were a more interesting play."

But the dramatist had his revenge. The talk with uncle Henry had done Susan's spirits good, and generally inclined her to respond to the scenes of comedy which now lightened the emotional interest. The over-superiority, with which she had begun her evening, quietly faded away : it was something to get back to a tradition of wit, however conventional the wit might be. It was something to have the solemnities of our realism tempered and relieved by a little irrelevant laughter. If only the manners of the people on the stage had been in the tradition, too ! When some one that afternoon had said to her, "When immorality becomes middle-class, literature is sure to suffer," she had not quite seen what he meant ; now, beyond the fun of the moment, she had an idea she saw. She was sorry when the curtain fell.

But she was glad to go back to uncle Henry. She took the talk up at the point at which it had been cut off.

"About telling the truth, uncle Henry," she said. "Wouldn't you say John told the truth ? "

"I am quite sure he does."

"Well, then— "

"But does he make it pay ? "

"Pay ? "

"I beg your pardon. 'Pay' is an offensive word. Is the size of his audience, shall I put it, in proportion, do you think, to the value of what he has to give ? "

"No—probably not."

"That's it. He relies too much on the love of truth in his fellow men. His gold would be more serviceable for a general currency if it contained a little alloy. A rationalistic religion is pretty much a contradiction in terms."

Susan smiled. "If you were a Rationalist, uncle Henry, you would say he relies too much on the emotions."

"Ah, that is an interesting point of view. But can one rely too much on the emotions ? In religion, I mean. I should say that in religion the imagination and the emotions are the essential things to rely on. Reason comes a very

poor third. There is an old Talleyrand story, which I have no doubt you know. A young man, who was endeavouring to found a religious movement, came to Talleyrand one day, and complained that he was not drawing all men unto him. He had tried various experiments, he said, but without any great success. Talleyrand listened sympathetically. At last he said, 'You tell me you have tried various experiments. Have you ever tried this? Have you ever thought of being crucified and rising again the third day?' I suspect that story lets in a good deal of light."

Susan was amused. "You are rather wicked, aren't you? But to go back to yourself. Did you find that things got easier as time went on?"

"No. I have never found that things got easier."

"You didn't get used to it?"

"No. I have never got used to it."

"You are not encouraging, you know!"

Uncle Henry shook his head. "I have faced reality too long. Whatever I may have done in Paris or Vienna, I have faced reality in Eaton Place."

Susan laughed. "Well, then—what's to be done?"

"I am afraid there is nothing to be done. I was seventy-six last birthday, and I have never found there was anything to be done."

"And I was only thirty!" Susan sighed.

"That is why, because my philosophy has proved so inadequate," uncle Henry went on, "that I am so glad to have your sympathy."

"Mine!"

"And why I venture to hope I can make you some small return."

"You're a dear—if that's what you mean!" Susan said.

Again he laid his hand gently on hers.

"Come to me, Sue," he said, "whenever you feel the need of a talk. We may help one another to manage our rudderless boat."

Once more the curtain rose.

V

The maid had left the tray with the syphon and the sandwiches on John's big table in the library, and had also left—more important still—a glowing and comfortable fire. Susan took off her cloak, and sank into one of John's large armchairs.

John himself attended to the tray.

"What will you have?" he asked.

Susan told him, and he took her a plate and a glass. Then, adequately provided himself, he settled down on the other side of the fire.

With its warmth and its shadows and its large armchairs, to say nothing of the comforts of the tray (her dinner had been disturbed, and Susan was hungry), the library was, it occurred to her, a very good room to come back to. By day there were times, she felt, when the fireplace, whose original stood in a green-shuttered old house near Caudebec, marred the dignity of the room by over-emphasising its modernness: nowadays too many people tried for an effect of this kind. But at night when the room was dim and the fire aglow, and the red bricks of the inner walled space below the chimney had their nice old red brick look, one could put oneself back in the firelight of a past of ghosts and legends, and make strange figures keep one company. The lamp on the wall beyond the fireplace was the only lamp they had lighted, and she was able to see the whiteness of Savonarola's bust without seeing the grimness of his nose.

It was the room that Susan liked best. Certainly, it was the room in which she most liked to be with John. In the other rooms of the house, she had two rather opposite feelings: they belonged to him a little too much, and they

did not belong quite enough. In the drawing-room, for instance, he had had more to do with the arranging of things than, as a man, he should : in the matter of hanging the pictures, and of placing a good deal of the furniture, she had allowed him to have his way. It meant so much to him to have his way. It was a necessity of his nature to be right—right in small things as well as in great, in choosing a place for a picture as in devising a definition of God ; and is it much use to be right if one does not also have one's way ? But Susan would have liked to have hers. Because she had not had it, the room had suffered some loss of intimacy.

On the other hand, she cared for their things ever so much more than he. The possessive instinct was weak in him—possibly, it was non-existent : he got more pleasure from hanging a picture (especially when some one had suggested a different place) than ever he could get from owning it. He was not ascetic—not the least little bit in the world ; the amenities of life appealed to him, and his taste was always good : but, inwardly, he was detached. He seemed always to be moving on ; she thought of his life, even in this permanent and very substantial abode of theirs, as a kind of glorified camping out.

But the library really belonged to him. Nowhere else—the pulpit apart—had he attained to so complete an expression of himself. The weighty modern books on the shelves, with the best of our science and knowledge stored in their contemporary pages, had reference to the interests and the aims that made the significance of his life ; the portraits of the famous people on the walls spoke of the range of his sympathies. In the other rooms, he came to her—but never in any true sense ; here—without too much disappointment to either of them—she felt she could come to him. Here she had his working, prophetic, public character side, and it was the side with which she found it least difficult to put up, partly because she admired his powers and respected his work, and partly because one naturally did not look to

this side of a man for those things which women are apt to expect the men they have married to give them.

She felt, however, in an intimate firelight time like this, that it would have been a still better room to come back to if she could also have come back to John. But she knew she had not come back to him. She knew it the more because he was now quite human and companionable, ready to meet her, to follow her lead, to talk of whatever she pleased. The play had been of no interest to him, but he was too active-minded to be bored; there were few things from which he could not get an idea of one kind or another that would in some way serve his purpose. His evening had rested him and changed his thoughts and generally quieted him down. And he was not one of those people who keep the best of themselves for company. He was more natural, more interesting—*humanly* interesting, that is—when one had him alone. Furthermore she was feeling contrition. In those intervals between the acts uncle Henry and she had been too like conspirators. The moment one joined forces against anybody one began to remember points in his favour. All this Susan saw and felt and knew, and it was just because she understood how favourable the moment was, how responsive his mood, how free from any active antagonism her own, that her sense of remoteness from him had its peculiar poignancy. She had no wish to be alone, but she would have liked to be with some one else. She would have liked—oh, so completely!—to be with one of the people at home. How she would have loved to be with George, for instance!—or, it might be, with Sarah! It was just that—she would have liked to be with some one else.

"Put my glass on the tray, John, will you?" she said. "And give me a cigarette."

John put her glass on the tray, and gave her a cigarette from his case. He lighted a cigarette himself. Then he returned to his own armchair.

"It was an old-fashioned play" Susan reflected. "But it had some amusing scenes."

"I am glad you were amused," John said.

"Irene was a much tried woman." Irene was the heroine's name.

"Tried—and, I am afraid, found wanting."

"The young man hadn't much in him."

"But however much he had had— "

Susan drew back. The lover solution did not appeal to her much, but she felt disinclined for morals.

"Yes, I know," she said.

She looked at John. She recognised, as she usually did, that John was good to look at. His face never lost its interest —not even its interest for her: its individuality was a matter of meaning quite as much as a matter of feature. Its strength did not mar its sensitiveness, its ruggedness had a kind of subtlety. There was nothing in it of the hardness, the ruthlessness, the look of the bird of prey, that you often see in strong men's faces. Whatever his aims might be, you might be certain that they were not predatory. She would have preferred that the dark lock of his hair had not been brushed back from his forehead—that somehow, she knew, was wrong; but she could think of no better way of doing it. His armchair was big, and his big body seemed to fill it. His dinner jacket fitted well. But her contemplation of him, sympathetic as it was, brought her no real comfort; it merely deepened the sense of her helplessness. He was too strong and complete, too adequate to all emergencies, too masterful, too dominating, too immensely sure of himself. He seemed never to have done any of those stupid things, those weak and foolish things, to say nothing of those wicked things, that leave humiliating memories. So far as she could remember, he had never acknowledged a mistake; the stories he told of himself were always more or less to his credit—often very much to his credit indeed. This was why it was so important to him to be right: he always had been, and the record must be maintained. And yet this monumental self-confidence of his—was it really in fact quite justified? As she looked at him now, and thought of herself,

she saw an obviously vulnerable place. Supposing she were to say to him, "John—why are you and I sitting together like this? What is the good of it? I don't want to be with you—you are only making me miserable; and there are hundreds of women who would suit you just as well—plenty who would suit you very much better. What is the good of it—tell me?"

The idea, of course, was absurd. One didn't say things like that to people—at all events, not in real life. She knew she was not more likely to make a speech of this kind than —she was looking at the fire again—to fly up that venerable chimney on a broomstick. Strange things must have happened, she was sure, in the old days at Caudebec. The mere habit of not saying things like this made it impossible to say them. He would suffer far too much. She knew how much he would suffer, but she had no illusions as to where the blow would fall. It would not be in his affections that he would suffer most. He was sensitive and emotional; he was fond of her; he would have a bad time to go through. But she was not essential to his happiness, and the crisis would soon be over. It was in his conception of himself that he would suffer—suffer longest and suffer worst. It was on his egoism that the blow would fall. She could not imagine his having to acknowledge that he had been so wrong as all this.

He was speaking again, and she was so unconscious of his silence that his voice almost startled her.

"There seemed to be a good many smart people in the stalls this evening," he said.

"Perhaps. I think there were a good many strange ones."

She remembered the moment she had said it that he would not have observed the strangeness.

"Strange? In what way?"

She had to go on. "Did you notice the woman who sat next to you?"

He had not noticed the woman. "Was she very remarkable?"

" One never used to see people like that."

" Before the War ? "

" Before we had all sorts of changes."

Faintly, very faintly, his obligation to democracy stirred. " Perhaps her seat had been given to her."

Susan smiled. " It was just the opposite ! She looked as if she could have bought the whole house ! "

He didn't quite like it—just as she had foreseen. He felt at a slight disadvantage. " She was overdressed, you mean ? "

" It wouldn't have mattered how she was dressed ! "

" She was so impossible ? "

Susan nodded.

In a sense, of course, he was with her. He was no fonder of impossible women than she. But it was unwelcome to him to have to admit that her perception of the impossible was quicker than his, and was a matter of many more shades.

" A war," he said, " always brings social upheaval. One class goes under, and another steps into its shoes."

" If only the new feet fitted them better ! "

" They may not fit at present," he admitted, " but one day we may find, don't you think, that the new figures walk more upright ? "

" The profiteers ? Are they so especially upright ? "

" The profiteer must go, too."

" But who will be left ?—if you get rid of all the people you want to."

He laughed. " I think," he said, " we could do without the stalls."

" You wouldn't mind if there were no stalls ? "

" Not if the play were better."

Susan shook her head. " I don't wish every theatre to look like the Old Vic."

" But the work they do there ! "

" Is it the only place where they're doing good work ? "

They were silent again.

Why had she said these things ? His voice had been

friendly, his intention had been something more. He had mentioned the people because he had an idea that she liked to talk about people. And all the return she had made had been to take a line of slight, unnecessary provocation.

It was always more or less like this : she was always either giving a consent she did not feel, or expressing a difference she regretted. She was never quite natural with him. She was never really at rest.

And that was just what she wanted to be ! But would she ever be, unless she broke away altogether ? The idea of that speech had been absurd, but she played with it all the same. To do something desperate for once in one's life, to disappear from the scene in blue flames, so to speak, like the demon in a Christmas pantomime—what a relief it would be ! She might not be as modern as some people, but she was not a patient Griselda either. Whether by blue flames or otherwise, she did wish she could see an end !

She changed her position in the chair, and turned her face from the hearth. The wall was so deep in shadow that she could not see the subjects of the pictures, but she was looking, she knew, at the company of contrasting portraits. George Eliot was there, and Saint Teresa, and the head of Professor Weismann. On the cabinet of the card index stood the bust of Savonarola. Behind her was the curtained window. Behind her, too, was the table that had the silver things on it—the viatorium, the little heart-shaped nutmeg graters, the Christ on the enamelled cross. It was all very shadowy and quiet, all very intimate and dignified. Suddenly, an odd thought came to her. If she did make an end and go away—she was not at all likely to go away, but if she did—she believed that the thing she would most regret, the scene of which she would keep the most affectionate memory, would be just this very room. And the idea did seem to her odd. Surely it was curious that the room in which his egoism was most completely expressed should be the place where she was least reluctant to be with him ? It looked as if his egoism, after all, were not the true cause of

offence. She soon saw that it wasn't. In itself his egoism was something one could put up with, because, among other reasons, it had so much of the childlike in it. There was in it so much of illusion. The ambitions of these strong men, their messages and their missions, their aims, whether prophetic or predatory—what were they, from the point of view of fundamental things, the deepest and most human things, but wonderful and glorified toys? Only a child—or a very strong man—could be so absorbed in his game. Only a man or a child could go on living with you, having you by his side year in year out, without ever knowing, or caring to know, what you were really like. She unexpectedly remembered his mother. Did his mother ever think of him, she found herself wondering, in any such way as this?

She was so deep in their silence that though she saw him get up from his chair she hardly took the movement in. He came to her.

"You look very tired," he said.

His voice and his eyes were kind. There was a tenderness, she fancied, just in the bend of his head. In spite of all that had been passing within her in the last half hour, she was seized with an irrational hope. She looked up at him.

"Yes, I am tired," she said.

His eyes were still kind. She got up. She felt that she must be near him.

"You were nearly asleep, weren't you?" he asked.

She was standing quite close to him now. She looked into his eyes, and looked as deep as she could. She was conscious of a strange intensity. She felt she must give him the chance.

"Not quite," she said.

She intensely wanted him to seize it. She wanted him just simply to take her in his arms and kiss her. She wanted —wanted quite desperately—to tell herself she was wrong.

He looked away.

He saw a paper lying on the table. He went to the table, and picked the paper up. He beamed. "Ah, I was right!"

he exclaimed. "I was sure I had brought it home. Beale declared I had lost it."

The light went from her face.

"John!"

She murmured it under her breath.

VI

Susan took uncle Henry at his word.

One day after lunch—a lunch which John, detained in the Edgware Road, had not shared with her—she rang uncle Henry up, and received an invitation to tea at his club.

Susan in her time had paid other visits to men's clubs, and had found them unimaginative places. A doubt had crossed her mind as to whether even their famous comfort were not the least little bit of a superstition. Surely comfort consisted in something more than the things on which one sat? Did it not also consist in the things at which one looked? These were questions that the immense room, in which uncle Henry entertained her, set Susan asking once more, for when she had looked long enough at those of uncle Henry's fellow members whom she could see from her chair, what more had her eyes to do? The wonderful array of newspapers in the rack by the door, the writing tables between the high windows, the uniformity of the small square tables round which the low leathern chairs were grouped, the three or four pictures on the walls (a sudden fierce sympathy with the vorticists seized her as she looked at them), the dust-like effect of the lingering haze of tobacco-smoke :— did the comfort of all this rise any higher than the comfort of a Pullman car? Even the observation of uncle's Henry's fellow members afforded no real satisfaction. The club was a fortress, she knew, of her own dearly-loved tradition. The members were men with names and positions and careers, and in many cases, she conjectured, with broad old acres at home. But as she saw these middle-aged and elderly persons reading their newspapers or having their teas, or having their afternoon naps, she experienced a sense of

disillusionment. It was not a very gracious feeling, and certainly it was a little irrational : how else could they have looked, these poor dear men, what else had she expected them to be doing ? But the atmosphere they created was heavy with the suggestion of dullness. She thought of her own camp. As George had once pointed out, she probably lived in the wrong one ; but she wondered whether a camp (even the wrong one) were not to be preferred to a fortress —if its walls were at all too thick and high.

Her fellow guests were more amusing to contemplate. It was one of the rare afternoons when ladies were admitted to the club, and some four or five were keeping her company. She felt that their bright summer hats and dresses enlivened the greyness of the sombre chamber as some gay southern bird might enliven the winter heather of her moor.

But it was uncle Henry whom she had come to see, and he proved as satisfying as ever. Even in his morning coat, which naturally had not quite the fine effect of evening dress, he still enjoyed, with his white hair and his courtier-like look, that air of an " unmistakeableness " (so Susan put it to herself) which she rather missed in other parts of the room. Moreover, she had not come merely to see uncle Henry ; she had come more particularly to talk to him.

The table on which their tea things stood was in a corner of comparative privacy, near the fireplace furthest from the door : Susan, in her low armchair, could just see into the emptiness of the summer grate over the padded leather top of the fender with its rows of small brass bars. As, however, her chair was at an angle to the fireplace, she had command of all the passing scene.

" Uncle Henry," she said by and by, " tell me : did you ever think of running away ? "

He lifted the lid from the hot buttered toast and handed the dish to her. " Finish it, Sue," he said. " I don't eat hot buttered toast."

Susan took the last piece. " Did you, uncle Henry ? " she insisted.

He placed the dish on the table. "Certainly, my dear. Is there any one, in a position like ours, to whom the idea does not occur?"

"But you never *did*!"

His melancholy eyes were on her. "Yes, I did, Sue. I actually packed my portmanteau, and bolted."

Susan laughed. "But how spirited of you! Do tell me about it. I don't remember ever having heard—"

"No. The incident is not recorded in our family annals."

"It sounds rather mysterious."

"I am afraid you will be disappointed, Sue. It is a very commonplace story."

Susan yielded a point. "Oh, well," she said, "I know, of course, how it ended. You came back. But wasn't it rather exciting while it lasted?"

Uncle Henry considered. "I was excited at Dover, I remember. I believe I was excited at Calais. It is probable that I was excited still even when I arrived in Paris. But before I left, other emotions had begun to supervene."

"You came back from Paris?"

"No. I carried my programme out."

"And where did you go, uncle Henry?"

"Ah, you will see that my warning was justified. I went where in imagination all couples go—and some go even in fact. I went to the Riviera. Unfortunately, for the interest of my romance, I was not—so to speak—a couple. I travelled alone. But Nice proved a wise choice. It facilitated my return by providing a pretext for my absence."

"You meant to go for good?"

"Certainly—when I packed my portmanteau."

"And what made you change your mind?"

Uncle Henry tried to remember. "There must, I think, have been several reasons. No doubt, an infirmity of purpose was one of them. Another was perhaps that four months of Nice proved enough. I had seen other palm trees, Sue, than those of Nice, and a sea more consistently blue. But I

think the simplest account I can give would be—I wanted to know how your aunt was getting on."

"Without you?"

"Well, no, hardly that. That had been disclosed in her letters. I was more especially interested in her career."

"You had not given aunt Frances your—your full programme?"

"No. I had intended to write from Paris. In Paris I fancied I might find a more delicate inspiration in Nice. But Nice counselled postponement. With so admirable a pretext for a temporary absence in my hand, I put off the burning of my boats."

"And when you did get back?"

"I found your aunt exceptionally busy. Pressure of work that spring prevented her from giving due weight to the little indications I offered her."

"Poor aunt Frances!" Susan sighed.

"Yes, you are right. The episode was not to my credit. I make no defence of it. I can only hope that I made some amends to your aunt by my deepened interest in her career. My interest was certainly genuine."

Susan waited.

"In those days, you see—I speak of many years ago—women did not respond as they do nowadays to the call of the public platform. My own position, as the husband of a pioneer, had a novelty which you, my dear Sue, who are in, if not of, a very different world, will find it difficult to appreciate. But my interest was not wholly personal. It had some saving grace of speculation. I, too, in my time, you know, had been engaged in public work. My old profession, as your aunt has convinced me, does not stand high in public favour; but in our mistaken way, as she kindly admits, we tried to serve our country. And to serve one's country is to serve one's fellow men. To keep one's temper as well as one's head, when the public at home has lost both, is to do a good turn to humanity. I saw that she and I, different as our immediate aims might be, had at least a

similar intention. I further saw that we were working in the same material. Human nature was the stuff with which we both had to deal. There were important differences between us both of method and aim, but the essential difference was this : I was a Rationalist, and she a believer in the supernatural."

" In the supernatural—aunt Frances ? "

" The supernatural has a very strong hold on us still."

" You are thinking of spiritualism, and things like that ? "

" No, I am not thinking of spiritualism. I am thinking of our social idealists. In the optimism of our social idealists, as some one has said, you have the latest phase of our belief in the supernatural. Nature for them has no uniformity, one might almost say no laws. I speak, of course, of human nature. They believe that with man all things are possible, as it was once believed that with God all things were possible. Evidence has as little to do with the one form of faith as the other. This is why your aunt's position interested me so deeply. As you know, she imagines herself to be a Rationalist —a Rationalist of as deep a dye as your husband. She is in fact a believer in the supernatural—as I suppose he is too. Both are keeping the old light burning, passing the old torch on. And both, I dare say, are right. The supernatural keeps its hold on us by reason of its profound romance. My interest is certainly genuine, and "—he looked at Susan a little whimsically—" I hope it is free from malice."

Susan smiled. It was her lot, however, to hear elsewhere a good deal of talk of this kind, and she was inclined to head uncle Henry off. " You know what all this means ? "

" Means, Sue ? "

" That you—just simply—*missed* her ! "

Uncle Henry smiled—and his smile had significance. " That is the point—I am almost tempted to say the moral —of my little story, Sue. My philosophy is a mere embellishment."

Susan lowered her voice. " You were very fond of her all the time ! "

Still uncle Henry smiled.

"And that makes all the difference!" "Between—?"

"What you call our two 'positions.'"

Uncle Henry no longer smiled. "I understand, my dear," he said.

Susan looked around her again. A cold daylight came from the sunless windows; the members scattered in the sombre spaces of the room appeared almost distant figures. A feeling elusive and vague, a feeling hard to interpret, the sense, perhaps, of an old attachment broken, of a piece of sure ground from which she had slipped away, lay behind her immediate impressions of the scene. It was not at all that she had lost faith in her old tradition, but the fact that she was so much aware of it proved that she had become detached. She felt like one who has sojourned so long in strange lands, and seen so many strange offerings made to so many strange gods, that he finds something to wonder at in the offerings made even to his own. She looked at the other women, and she somehow felt glad they were there.

"But flight, like force, is no remedy," uncle Henry added.

"I am not very likely to try," Susan said. "Victoria is as far as I should ever be able to get. I haven't the spirit—even if I had a much better reason."

"There are wiser ways of showing one's spirit."

"You mean—by making the best of it?"

"Might one not say by trying to discover how to make the best of oneself? It is always a pity to miss a good chance."

"You have found aunt Frances a chance?"

Uncle Henry smiled. "I have the one justification for preaching, Sue—I have not practised. One can put up with a sermon when it's preached by a fellow sinner. But I think I may say to you what you said just now to me. You said, 'Poor aunt Frances!' May I not say, 'Poor John!'?"

"Oh, I feel that, too," Susan said.

"But don't feel it too much, my dear. In your way, you, too, I am sure, are trying to make amends."

Susan shook her head. "No, I'm horrid."

"I should be surprised to hear John say so."

"You see," Susan explained, "I never feel I have got him right. There is so much of him—and it's all so different!"

"John's a man of marked personality."

"For one thing, of course, he's a perfect saint! He has never done an inconsiderate thing all the time we've been married! Think of that!"

For the moment, however, uncle Henry thought of their tea. "The cake, Sue," he said. "I have no great confidence in it, but if you have the courage—"

Susan thanked him and declined, alluding to the covered dish which had once contained hot buttered toast.

"And John's no fool, either," he said.

"I suppose he's a genius, isn't he?"

Uncle Henry's face was grave. "It's a formidable combination, Sue. No wonder you have your troubles."

"It's too much for me," Susan sighed.

Again she looked at her fellow guests. They were sitting, like herself, in chairs that were a little too big for them and a little too low, and were being entertained by men who, if not so satisfying as her own uncle Henry, were at all events sufficiently presentable. Of the many things these women might have suggested to her, they suggested only one: she knew they were taking the scene for granted as she would once have taken it for granted herself, and could not take it for granted now. They might have discovered—they probably had—that this was not one of the gayest of London clubs; but they knew no other world than the one for which it stood, and could not have her sense of a return from another. She envied them the comfort of their undisturbed acquiescence: one need not love the old gods less because from the point of view of some of their worshippers one finds one has moved away.

" Uncle Henry," she said, " the trouble is that I am not very old."

" And the way, Sue, looks rather long ? "

" Shall I ever be able to keep it up ? "

He waited a moment or two. Then he laid his hand very gently on Susan's knee. " If there had been children, Sue— "

She nodded. " Yes, if there had been children— That, of course, would have changed everything. But I feel it is best as it is."

" Why do you say that, my dear ? "

" Our ideas would have been too different. I know it is cowardly of me, but if we had had children, I should have had to fight for them, and I am glad not to have to fight. He would have been fond of them, he would have been very kind ; but I should not have liked what I know he would have wanted to make of them. It's best as it is."

" It goes as deep as that—the difference between you ? "

" You see ? It couldn't go much deeper, could it ? "

" Yes, I see," uncle Henry said.

" Shall I ever be able to keep it up ? " she asked again.

Uncle Henry was patient and waited.

" And which is worse, do you think—to keep it up, or not to ? "

" A difficult question, Sue."

" It's like this," Susan went on. " It would not cost him much to lose me. If I were ill, there would be absolutely nothing he would not do—he's at his best when there is anything to be done. But if I died, a few days after the funeral he would be thinking of something else. He couldn't keep his attention fixed on me. His mind is much too active."

" You go too far," uncle Henry checked her. " This looks like bitterness."

" Yes, I am afraid it does. I am sorry. What I mean is that he could do very well without me. But to discover that he had failed with me, that he had not made me happy,

that I had no real wish to be with him—this would be a dreadful blow. It would be a dreadful blow to his egoism. 'Egoism,' too, I suppose, has a bitter sound, but it's the word I always use. I dare say I use it too often. I see egoism in nearly all he does. It's becoming a kind of obsession with me to look for it. You can find egoism, of course, in what every one does if you are mean enough to keep on looking for it. Anyhow, it would be a dreadful blow. For the strange part of it is that in a way my opinion counts with him. There is a sense in which—I know what a complete contradiction it sounds—it counts for more than any one's else. You wouldn't expect he would mind—but he would! I believe no other kind of failure would affect him quite so intimately, go quite so deep. His whole feeling about himself would suffer. He would be weakened. His self-confidence would be weakened. His very work might suffer. I have no wish to hurt him even in the ordinary way, and to deal a blow like this would be altogether too cruel."

"I think it would," uncle Henry said.

"On the other hand," Susan went on, "I have dreary visions of the future. I see myself becoming one of those dreadful people who go through life with a grievance. Or one of those faded, effaced, featureless women, whom people have to put up with for the sake of their brilliant husbands. I see myself growing flatter and flatter. And have I really to submit to all this? Am I to go on repressing myself and repressing myself until— "

"There is nothing but the psycho-analyst left for you?"

"Yes, something like that," Susan laughed.

Uncle Henry offered her a cigarette. When she had taken it, he struck a light and handed it to her. "You exaggerate the danger," he said. "One can keep oneself quite up to the mark without doing wicked things every day. There is no need to take so much trouble. You will never be dreary, Sue."

"It is a comfort to know you think so."

Uncle Henry looked at her in his appraising, penetrating way.

"You have changed a good deal in the last two years."

"Have I? I hope it has been a change for the better."

"You always had good looks. Now, my dear, you have beauty."

"You do say the dearest things!"

"Your manner, too, has changed. It has become more assured. Your aunt was saying the other day that you grow more like your mother. Your mother had many admirers, Sue."

"It looks as if unhappiness had rather agreed with me," Susan laughed. "I thought it was happiness that was supposed to be good for one's looks."

"One must allow for the mind within."

He was still looking at her with his penetrating, but slightly disturbing, directness. "You will prove the stronger of the two."

"I! Stronger than John?"

"Yes, in the end, I think."

"But why do you think that?"

Uncle Henry looked away, and made a small gesture of deprecation.

"I am not a psycho-analyst, Sue. Only, perhaps, a person of some observation."

"I am sure you are that, uncle Henry."

"But in the mean time— " he said.

"Yes, in the mean time?"

"Keep it up, my dear. Do your best not to hurt him."

Susan's eyes strayed once more to the groups in the leathern arm-chairs.

"I will try," she said. But to this, in a moment, she added, "I am afraid he will find me out."

PART VI

I

Anne Burrows had finished the washing up, which had not taken her long. The water had been so nice and hot that the things had not needed much wiping. She hung the cloth she had used over the open door of the oven, though as the things had been their tea things and the oven had not been lighted since dinner, the gain to the cloth was uncertain. She removed the apron which had protected her Sunday dress, folded it up, and switched off the kitchen light.

She found Kate by the sitting-room fire, reading the *Sunday Times*. She looked up from the paper, and turned in her wicker chair.

"You oughtn't to have done it," she said. "You know I wanted to."

Anne smiled. "It wasn't your turn," she said.

"But you have had such a tiring expedition."

Anne took another chair—it was of the same austerity as Kate's—on the other side of the fire. "I shall have time for a little rest," she said. "I need not get ready just yet."

"You are not really going this evening?"

Anne looked guilty. "I must, I am afraid. I was not there this morning, and I told Mr. Beale I would steward for him to-night."

"He could get some one else."

"Besides," Anne added, "I should like Mr. Hepworth to know. I believe Charlie's worse than the doctor thinks."

"You have not seen the doctor to-day?"

"No, I go by what the landlady told me. She said he doesn't think there's much the matter."

"But you're afraid it's more than a chill?"

"I don't know. He has a look I don't much like."

"But what can Mr. Hepworth do?"

" I feel Charlie would like to see him."

Kate let the *Sunday Times* drop to the floor by her chair, and put her feet on the fender. Her skirt was not very long, but from habit she drew it up a little the better to warm her legs.

" It is strange," she said.

" What is ? "

" That Charlie should have made such a friend of Mr. Hepworth."

" Do you think that strange ? A good many young men have made a friend of Mr. Hepworth."

" But have they been quite Charlie's sort ? "

Anne smiled. " You are thinking of that prank he played us last year."

" Prank ! He gave you a dreadful shock ! "

" Yes," Anne admitted, " it certainly was a shock. But there was no real harm in it."

" Perhaps not. But it was a stupid thing to do."

Kate, however, as Anne knew very well, was quite tolerant of Charlie's prank. We are usually tolerant of people who help us to prove our point, and that " mysterious disappearances " seldom contain much mystery was a conviction of her sensible mind. When people were trying to explain the nine days' wonder by the aid of psychological tags, she liked to remind them that human foolishness can be made intelligible without recourse to popular science. Charlie's escapade had been of the foolishest, but it had not caused Kate perplexity. Charlie had gone that night to London Bridge to see a friend off to Brighton, where the friend had obtained a job, and an impulse had seized Charlie to take a ticket himself. The friend had egged him on, offering to put him up, and offering to make good his want of luggage with the contents of the suit case under the seat. And Charlie, as he put it himself, had said " Damn it all," and gone. When he had added that he was " feeling beastly fed up with the shop," Kate had understood him still better. She could not imagine

herself taking an unpremeditated ticket to Brighton, but she had known what it was to feel fed up with her bank. The point Charlie had not made clear was why he had not written to his firm. It was unlikely that conscience in a case like this would seriously impair invention. All Charlie could tell them was that he hadn't " felt like writing," and Kate conjectured that his employers had just been damned with the rest. When he had spent his money, he had, of course, come quietly back. He had arrived at his lodgings an hour or two after Anne's visit to Hepworth. And thanks to the discretion of his landlady nothing might have come of this sudden adventure, if Mr. Hemmings had not paid his untimely call. That had made a serious difference. The firm had been sorry to let Charlie go, but a tendency to mysterious disappearances was not a trait they cared to encourage even in their most promising salesmen.

Hepworth had come to the rescue. He had had a long talk with Charlie. It must have been of a singularly judicious kind, for the young man had emerged with his spirit chastened, but with his confidence won. Hepworth had next persuaded one of his members, who had a business in the south of London, to find Charlie a job. All of which had been accompanied by the exercise of an " influence," which for Kate provided the one element of mystery. She knew that the impulses, to which Charlie no longer yielded, had been of many undesirable kinds.

" I shall go and see him again to-morrow," Anne said. " I wish he were in better lodgings."

" Are they worse than the ones he had near Oxford Street ? "

" They are dingier. And the landlady's just as bad."

" Couldn't he move—when he's better, I mean ? "

" He wants to be near his work, and he says they are all alike about there."

" South London is a dreary region."

" It seemed very dreary this afternoon."

" It would ! December—and the shops all closed ! "

Kate looked into the fire. The dreariness appeared to go all through her : the dinginess of the young man's lodgings, the dreariness of the Sunday streets. The dreariness of the life she herself had lived in lodgings was an iron that had entered her soul. She could never hear lodgings mentioned, even at this time of day, without a renewal of gratitude for the mercy of her own escape. To have one's own things about one, to have one's own pictures on the wall, and not to have the pictures and things of a landlady, not to have the unending disagreeables and disputes, was a blessedness of which time had not dulled her abiding sense. And there was Anne herself. Kate might now perhaps have achieved a flat of her own, for she had taken up her teaching again, and had secured some rather good work ; but her flat would have been a bleak, if a garnished, place without Anne to keep her company. And at times, when the thought of this came over her, she liked to take little looks at Anne. There was comfort and restfulness and security in her large quiet confident presence. And she loved to see Anne doing nothing. She was not often to be seen doing nothing, seen with her hands in her lap, but when she was, how the real Anne came out ! It was absurd to have such a thought, to have such a thought of Anne—Anne the practical, Anne the efficient, Anne of the office, Anne of the lecture and meeting, Anne of the high public claim, of the beneficent social ideal : but there were moments when Kate positively longed never to see her doing anything more ! Absurdity could go no further. But there was this justification for her foolishness, that there was something in Anne that did not belong to the office, nor even to the lecture or public claim : something altogether inward and lovable and obscure. It was always Kate's way to find people obscure when they descended to inner depths. To put it differently, she realised that Anne had something to give which she herself had not. Something to give, and something which ought to be given. Moreover, she had discovered in the course of the last twelve months

that it was something which Anne herself wanted to give. That made the poignancy of it. It was one of those things that one tried not to put into words ; one tried to be loyal, to respect Anne's reticent delicacy : but Kate couldn't help it—she knew ! She knew to what altar Anne would have brought her gift, if prohibitions and obstacles of all sorts and kinds had not barred and forbidden her approach.

Kate's preoccupation came to be reflected in her face. Anne noticed the look, and smiled. " What are you thinking about ? " she asked.

Kate had, of course, to cover her tracks. " Aren't we getting rather warm in here ? I believe we have got both windows shut."

She rearranged her skirt and got up. The window, however, to which she went, proved to be properly open. Kate lifted the blind, and looked out. It seemed to be very dark outside. She heard footsteps coming up the Walk—a man's to judge by their loudness. He turned in at the garden next door. The gate, as he opened it, made its usual offensive little squeak.

" How they can stand it ! " she exclaimed.

" Stand what ? "

" That gate. The girl next door has a bicycle. A drop or two from her oil can would stop the stupid noise it makes."

Kate came back to the fire. In spite of the supposed warmth of the room, she again put her feet on the fender.

" How little one knows," she said, " of what men see in each other."

" Do we always know what women see ? "

" In other women ? Not always. But when one doesn't know, one *feels*. With men one has no idea."

" Are you thinking of Charlie and Mr. Hepworth ? "

Kate admitted that she was. " How, really, did Mr. Hepworth do it ? "

" Do what ? "

" Persuade Charlie to give up—the pranks—and all the *other* queer things."

"For one thing, I suppose, Mr. Hepworth has been very kind."

Kate shook her head. "Kindness alone won't do it. People don't give up bad habits because you are kind. It takes more to do it than that. And the phrases we use leave us just where we were. When we call the thing that does it personal influence, or personality, or personal magnetism, or something like that, we get no nearer to it than if we called it the grace of God."

"That," Anne quietly said, "is just what I should call it."

"You would?" But Kate remembered. "You believe in God," she said.

"Yes, I believe in God. In a case like this, I believe the grace of God is the power of the goodness in one human being to bring out the goodness in another."

"That sounds as mystical as the old supernaturalism."

"Isn't that just what it should be?"

"But you reject supernaturalism."

"Only as an explanation," Anne said. "The mysteries it tried to explain are there just as much as ever. What we now see is that the power which works the wonders is a power within ourselves. It works in and through the best in each and all of us. This does not make it the less mysterious, but it does deepen our dependence on the best both in ourselves and in others."

Into Kate's mind there strayed some familiar words. "'There is none other that fighteth for us but only Thou, O God.' What do you say to that?"

"To me," Anne said, "that seems perfectly true."

"God being the power of goodness in us?"

"In us and in others—in all that is good. And the power of truth and beauty as well."

"And that is the object you worship?"

"I believe it is the object we all are worshipping, whether we know it or not. We have different symbols for it, different images, different words; but it is the same

power that fights on all our sides. For us in the Movement," she added, " words are a special difficulty. The language of the churches is old, and every one is familiar with it. The words we have to use are new, and that is very unfortunate."

Kate considered for a moment or two. " You know, of course—know much better than I—that strangers sometimes say that you have no object of worship."

" That is deeply untrue." Anne's voice rose a little. " No object of worship can yield a richer experience than ours."

Kate looked into the fire again. What she saw there was not the truth, or otherwise, of the things Anne was saying, but the pity, or the irony, of her being the person to say them. Surely, a woman who had caught such inner meanings as these had something rather precious to give ! To give to any one no matter who he might be ! . . . Oh, yes, she wished to be sensible. Life was not all affinities—she knew that perfectly well. Life bristled with hard distinctions—differences of habit and speech, distinctions of calling and class : they were hard pointed things, these distinctions, and if you did not pay attention to them, you might get very badly hurt. Besides, even if the distinctions had not been there, would there have been any real hope ? Had he not shown by the woman he had married the kind of woman he wished to marry ? But commonsense did not get the last word. Kate, too, in her turn, became mystical. She had not Anne's religious feeling, and she had not Anne's religious faith, but she had that sense of the drama of life which leads you sooner or later to a belief in powers behind the players. Was there not a theory, indeed, that religion sprang from drama ? However this might be, certainly at that moment she did see powers behind the players, and among them a demon of irony. Commonsense might say what it would, but there must be an affinity between two persons who held the same fine faith, walked by the same inner light, whose lives were touched to the same fine issues ; but in her drama these two persons were

sundered, quite hopelessly, by those external and accidental things, the finality of which it was the aim of both their lives to disprove. The irony of this was considerable. The old supernaturalism might be unsound, but its conceptions were an immense convenience. For herself, it was not often that Kate rebelled—when one had taken one's line one stuck to it ! but she did rebel for Anne. She rebelled against the fates or the gods or the demons, or whatever it was convenient to call them, who could allow such a gift of understanding, such a treasure of love, to be idly and wantonly wasted.

The voice of Anne brought her back.

" Time's getting on," she said. " I must go and put on my hat."

She rose, and Kate rose, too.

Then Kate did an unusual thing.

She went to Anne, and kissed her.

II

Anne stood just inside one of the swing doors through which you passed from the vestibule to the hall, ready to hand a music book to every one who went in. She took the books as she wanted them from a pile that stood by her side on a chair against the wall. They were large thin volumes, well-printed and well-bound, that contained the words of the anthems and the music as well as the words of the hymns and canticles of the service Hepworth had devised.

It was early, and few of the rush-seated chairs were occupied. Well-warmed and well-lighted, with a little cheerful coming and going among the stewards (there was a second steward in the central aisle, and a third at the other door), and a faint murmur of talk from two or three persons in the vestibule, the hall had that air of confident anticipation to be found in a church in which a good congregation is expected. Indeed the hall had so much the appearance of a church that " church " seemed the appropriate word. The rows of rush-seated chairs with a central aisle, the walls panelled to the sills of the windows, the pointed and raftered roof with the crossing beams from which hung the blue and gold chandeliers, the pulpit placed against what might have been an eastern wall, and approached, on each side, by a finely curved flight of stairs, the beautifully worked curtain that covered the panelling on this furthest wall—the effect of all this was eminently reverent and devotional, and, if one's taste were simple, was not without an element of beauty. Between the pulpit and the front row of chairs was an open space, on one side of which the organ stood, while, on the other, were the oak benches on which the choir sat in two rows. Behind these various appointments

and decorations lay the discretions of an artistic sense.

While the people were still slow in coming, Anne had time for a word or two with the friends who came and spoke to her. One of these friends was Beale ; he thanked her for keeping her promise. To Hepworth, who had entered by the main door in the vestibule, she had the chance of mentioning her nephew ; she shook hands with Susan who came in while she was still speaking to him. A tall pretty woman with a pleasant smile and a becoming hat consulted her as to a change of day for the next meeting of the working party (a bazaar was to be held in the spring). A matronly person, who had a cheerful air of being able to put things through, asked for her help for a forthcoming social tea. Anne said a few words to a young couple, whom Hepworth had lately married, and who had just returned from their honeymoon. These little scraps of business talk were whispered and hurried, but there was a great deal of friendliness in them.

When people arrived more continuously, Anne had to attend to her duties. She handed her books to members and strangers alike, but passed the strangers on to the care of the steward who had charge of the central aisle. He was a tall, spare, well-dressed man of fifty, with a strong clean-shaven face, a humorous mouth, a ruddy complexion, and rather fierce prominent eyebrows. The top of his head was bald, but the lower growth of his hair was thick, and a little loose and undisciplined. He was a barrister of considerable distinction, whose name was not unknown to the general public ; he had once been political editor of an important weekly, to which he was still an anonymous contributor. He had the tradition of Cambridge and the Public Schools. He was a personal friend of the Hepworths, with whom he often dined. Susan and he were great friends. He told amusing stories, and had an easy way of chaffing Hepworth. He gave much time to the Movement, and occasionally delivered the Discourse. His geniality and his graciousness had made him one of the Society's most popular members.

He showed people into their places with the courtesy of a kindly and benevolent host.

Among the persons to whom Anne gave her books there were many strangers, whom many motives had induced to come. There were those who were drawn by Hepworth's reputation as a speaker, by an interest in religious developments, by the search for a message that would meet their spiritual needs : others had come from mere curiosity, the expectation of they knew not what, or with the definite hope of witnessing rites fantastic enough to be funny or sufficiently impious to provide a thrill. The members themselves revealed no distinctive type. They were persons of many callings, and many degrees of material prosperity. There were three or four ladies whose garments suggested that they had strayed from a world of pure leisure. There was an artist, whose symbolism the Movement had helped to inspire, and a young poet whose work had appeared in several anthologies. There was the author of some amusing books for children, illustrated by herself with drawings that were still more amusing than the text ; she had lately finished a mystery play which was to be given in the hall of one of the Inns at Christmas. There was a comedian, a star of the variety world, who in the hours of his less public life pursued the newer theology. There were a good many people who taught. The work of one lay in the laboratory of a London college ; another was mistress in a High School well-known in the world of schools (its Head Mistress had occupied Hepworth's pulpit); there was a teacher of modern languages, and a bookbinder by whom a few favoured pupils were admitted to the sanctuary of his workroom ; there were two or three teachers from Council schools. There was a solicitor with a practice in the City, a woman doctor with a practice in the neighbourhood, and a woman who managed an estate agency business under her husband's name. The work of some of the two or three hundred people who filled the hall was of a curiously modern and specialised kind, but, in general, the safe

reticence of the magic words " Business " and " The City " covered most of the members' occupations.

Few communities are able to give quite good reasons for the adherence of all their members. The problem of why the given member has joined is often as difficult (though less discouraging) than the problem of why the given member has left. The people, to whom Anne handed her books, were of many types and many temperaments, and showed in their several ways many aspects of the modern conscience, many promptings of the modern will, and possessed—to make the problem more difficult—an experience of their own, domestic or otherwise, with which our epoch had not very much to do. They were people of character and a marked independence of mind, who, in breaking away from the routine of established observances, had neither drifted into the indifference of a general scepticism, nor dropped anchor in one of those strange havens of refuge, centres of the " Higher " this or the " Higher " that, in which the destitute idealist often finds a temporary shelter. Hepworth's gospel appealed as little to the idealist without commonsense as to sensible persons who had nothing else. They were people, for the most part, who had belonged at one time or another to a Christian Church or sect. With some the severance had been effected through crises of storm and stress, through periods of bitterness and strife—a bitterness which encounters with relations and friends had often considerably increased : but by most the outward journey had been made in stages of insensible transition, rather by a gradual ceasing to believe than by violent rejections and denials, by a passing from the narrow to the broad, and from the broad to a broader, and from the broadest their Church could give them quite out at last on to highways entirely unenclosed. These differences of temperament and experience were reflected in the devotional attitude of the worshippers. There were persons of a deep and fervent piety, with deep emotional and mystic needs, who found in the new form of worship what the

Churches of the older creeds were now unable to give them. Such persons were not very numerous, but in few congregations are all the worshippers persons of a fervent piety. At the other extreme were survivors from the days of a militant Rationalism : men who had ceased to be breakers of images, but with whom reason was still a jealous if no longer an angry god ; who were sensitive to any trifling with the intelligence ; who could do no more than put up with the service for the sake of Hepworth and the lecture. Between these extremes lay the general body of the membership : men and women of varying degrees of piety and response to the devotional appeal ; whose most persistent feeling, it might be, was just one of mere relief—of thankfulness for the escape they had effected from the old theological yoke ; whom a deepened social conscience made responsive to the democratic side of Hepworth's teaching, but whom an organisation more directly devoted to politics or reform would have left with a need unsatisfied. An amenity of mind and of manners remained with these people from the discipline of earlier days. It was a gathering, in a word, of intelligent and kind-hearted persons, whose sympathies were generous and warm.

III

Hepworth entered the hall by the curtained door near the pulpit, and mounted the curving stairs. He wore a black silk gown over a black silk cassock, and as he stood with his hand on the brass book-rest in the middle of the pulpit, he made a dignified and impressive figure.

The service began with an introit sung by the choir : after which Hepworth read, as " Opening Words," a sentence or two from Emerson. The music of the service consisted of a canticle, two anthems and two hymns : poems of Shelley, Sir Henry Wotton, Edward Carpenter, Clough, Robert Bridges, were set to the music of Palestrina, Bach, Richard Farrant, Rutland Boughton, Kennedy Scott. There were two lessons, chosen respectively from Thomas à Kempis and the work of a contemporary author, and a pause for silent meditation or prayer. The Discourse was delivered before the singing of the last anthem and hymn. There was a collection after the Discourse, and the service closed with two or three " Dismissory Sentences " taken from William Blake.

In the pulpit Hepworth came into his own.

Nature had given him three of her best good gifts—the voice, the presence, and the flow of words. His voice, rich, virile, variable, with many notes and many tones, was excellent for the outbursts of impassioned eloquence, and pleasant in the restraint of the careful statement and the quietness of the reasoned plea. His height, his massive figure and fine head, his air of a dignified acceptance of authority, predisposed his audience to respect. The special mark of his preaching was an essential virility. It was on the intelligence that he made his chief demand. He made it with the more success because nature had given him another

of her good gifts (for nature alone can give it)—a sure perception of where the real interest lay. He avoided the prolonged or needless explanation, the infliction of tiresome detail. Whether people dissented or agreed, they quite invariably listened.

His skill and his art were the reward of long experience. He relieved the strain of the weighty exposition with anecdotes and stories and reminiscences, and those little intimate personal confessions by which the heart of an audience is won. He had more than the kind of humour which saves one from showing a want of it : his congregation was known to laugh. He could rise from the colloquial to the impassioned ; he could gesticulate and let himself go. But art controlled the artifice, as sincerity controlled the art. His own emotions might play with him, but he seldom attempted to play with the emotions of his hearers. He wished to persuade, but he wished still more to convince. His tone and his temper were modern, and his choice of subject was often very modern indeed ; he could find material for edification in the novel or play in which people were interested at the moment. He used the language of science and philosophy, and the results of the latest criticism and research underlay most of his conclusions. But for all this modernness of subject and of speech, he was in the true succession of the preachers. He spoke as one who lived with the philosophers, but also held converse with the saints. He turned the eyes of his listeners inward. He tried to set their feet in the paths of peace and the blessedness of an inward tranquillity. His followers were not evil livers, not persons dead in trespasses and sins, and his summons was—very sensibly—to courage rather than repentance ; but he called upon the name of Duty. He would dwell on the obligations of the family and the home, and would speak of them with a kindly and humorous understanding of the frequent difficulty of their fulfilment ; he could touch on pains and pleasures of a very simple and homely kind. But the obligations, without mention of which he never

spoke, were those of the social conscience. He proclaimed a democratic ideal, and against the inequalities and injustices, the privileges, the acquisitiveness, the gross gains, that kept us from it, he waged an unending war. The cruelties of the existing order seemed to hurt him because they touched the real kindness of his heart. His faith in the destiny of man was intrepid, and his perorations, often his finest efforts, were splendid with a radiant hope. And yet, modern as he was, and at home in the modern world as he appeared to be, there were moments when his thought revealed to the attentive listener a detachment that was almost lonely. . . .

IV

The service was over.

There was no Conference that evening, and after the moment of stillness that came when the last words had died away, people picked up the things they had placed under their seats, and passed down the aisle to the doors. Anne collected the music books which they had left on the rush-bottomed chairs. She was helped by the steward who had been in charge of the other door. A little later, she switched off the lights in two of the large chandeliers. But in the dimness of the emptying hall, members of the Society still lingered. They gathered in the aisle, in the open space beneath the pulpit, and in the clearances they made for themselves by pushing the chairs from their even rows. A few strangers also remained to ask questions about what they had seen and heard.

Hepworth, in his gown and cassock, still a little stirred and excited, still feeling the strain of his lecture, moved from one person to another, receiving expressions of gratitude and appreciation from those who had sympathised and agreed, meeting the objections of others who had not proved so amenable, saying genial and welcoming things to any one who wished to have a few words with him. Susan did her duty, too. She enjoyed these little after-Sunday-service talks ; she got on well with the people and liked them. Among the persons she spoke to was Beale, and they chatted together some minutes. She had a liking for Beale. He was nice and human and easy to talk to, and was far from being what she would have expected him to be. Young men who lived at his high moral and intellectual level were apt to prove a little trying sometimes. Moreover, she was amused by Beale. He had adopted two or three of

John's smaller mannerisms ; he said things now and then almost as John would have said them. These unconscious echoes and reverberations of the Master's personality were amusing to the Master's wife. On the other hand, though his loyalty and devotion stuck out all over him, no one stood up to John quite so boldly as he. No one took him so much in just the right kind of way. Certainly, she didn't herself ! She often wished she could. No doubt John's mountainous personality threw its shadow even over the independence of Beale, but Beale was quite happy playing in the shade. The shade was lit—for Beale—with so much of the mountain's glory !

Still, much as she was impressed by his devotion and zeal, her thought of him took a worldly turn. He ought to be doing something much better !—better, that is, for himself. To have a brain like his meant success in almost anything, and though his present life was much pleasanter than any he had known before, what future could the Movement offer him ? Could it offer more than a living ? Without John's assistance, could it offer him even that ? An earnestness so impersonal, so disinterested, in a man so young, appeared to her a trifle unnatural. Did he never feel this himself ? So far as she knew, he never did. All the same, he was so like other people in most other ways that she cherished a wicked little doubt : she suspected that his connection with the Movement was, like her own, in reality something of an accident.

When she had released herself from Beale, she pushed back a chair or two, and made her way to Mrs. Tyrrell.

Mrs. Tyrrell was a plump, pink, young-looking little old lady, with white hair and gold-rimmed spectacles, and mild blue eyes that received you with a kind of welcoming confidence : it was as if she were sure, before you began, that you would have interesting things to say to her. Susan knew very little of her earlier life, but she fancied that though Mrs. Tyrrell had always been ready to be interested, it had only

been of late years—perhaps since her husband's death—that the readiness had been indulged. She was now making up for lost time, making the most of whatever opportunities came her way ; but her way, as Susan was aware, was still a quiet, rather sequestered path, shut in with hedges of traditional discretion, high hedges of a restricting taste, over which it was an adventure for her merely to take a peep.

Mrs. Tyrrell had a distant connection with a Shropshire family whose seat was near Weyburn Court. Susan had met members of it on visits she had paid to aunt Jane. If she had seen Mrs. Tyrrell only in her outdoor things, she would not have suspected a family tie of this kind ; but in her own drawing-room in Onslow Square, with the nicest of nice old things about her, in a quiet that gave her manner and a certain soft clearness of speech the chance to make an impression, the Shropshire relationship was not very difficult to admit. How she had come to join their Movement, Susan had no idea. It must have been the most adventurous thing that Mrs. Tyrrell had ever done. It was some years since she had taken this step, but the thrill of it had not subsided. The Movement made the great interest of her life. It was she who had sent the flowers which stood that evening in the tall floor-vase near the pulpit. She was not a religiously-minded old lady, and had confided to Susan that much as she liked the service, it was the Discourse she most enjoyed. This was likely enough, but how much of it all, Susan would often wonder, had the dear old head taken in !

Susan spoke to one or two other people, with whom her acquaintance was slighter, and then, when the hall was empty, and John had gone to his private room to change his gown, she had a few words with Anne.

Susan seldom missed the chance of a talk with Anne. If she thought of all John's followers—all those, that is, whom she knew—as " nice people," there were some of whom she was really fond. Among these Anne had a place of her own.

In the early days of her marriage, when the ways of the Society were strange to her, and she had needed an enlightenment which John's merely masculine perceptions could not give, Anne's tact and kindliness and rather motherly good sense had been of great service to her. Anne had helped her to see how the women of the Society felt about certain things, how much and how little—it was usually how little—they really wanted the wife of their President to do. Anne's help had been the more agreeable to accept because she could let you see which line it would be well to take without putting her point into words, and because she was one of those precious women to whom you could talk with the comfortable knowledge that what you said would go no further. This, more perhaps than anything else, had led to a pleasant understanding between them; their acquaintance had lost that note of a formal, half official relation with which it had not unnaturally begun, and had become, as time went on, a genuinely personal matter—a friendship with which, especially in the last year or so, the Movement had not had very much to do. When Susan thought of her nowadays, she thought of her hardly as a worker at all. She took Anne in a way of her own. Anne's large quiet confident presence had much the same kind of restfulness for her as it had for the devoted Kate Priestman. She placed Anne among very homely and human things. She might belong to John's pieties (she certainly did), but she also belonged to *hers*. For all Anne's public interests and her public work, Susan had an odd feeling that, strange as the conjunction seemed, she belonged to that part of life of which one thought in the moments when one remembered Sarah. She had a queer little sense that it was easy to pass from the thought of Anne to the thought of Hildon Place, and from the thought of Hildon Place to the thought of Anne.

When Susan joined her, Anne's duties were almost over. She had undertaken to give the key to the caretaker, and was merely waiting to lock the place up. She had seated

herself on the outer chair of the row nearest the vestibule. She rose when Susan came to her.

"Don't get up," Susan said. "I am sure you're tired. Stewarding is tiring work."

Anne moved to the next chair, and Susan sat down beside her.

"I am rather tired myself," Susan added.

"I have been to see Charlie to-day," Anne explained. "And I found it a trying expedition."

"I heard you tell my husband. I don't think he knew your nephew was ill."

"No. He has only been ill four days. He went to business as usual on Wednesday."

Susan looked at Anne. She saw in her face something more than mere tiredness. "You are—uneasy about him?"

"Yes," Anne admitted. "I am afraid he is worse than the doctor thinks."

Susan considered. She knew the young man's story, and had heard much of what John had done. "Perhaps," she suggested, "you would like my husband to go and see him?"

"Charlie would be very grateful," Anne said. "But it's a shame to trouble Mr. Hepworth. Walworth is such a tiresome place to get at."

"He won't mind that," Susan said. "We will speak to him as soon as he comes. And," she added, "we are going to drive you home to-night. The car is coming for us. You have had enough of tubes and things for one day."

Anne thanked her. "I think I have," she said. "I am not often so tired."

"It's because you're so worried, you know. Things always tire one more when one's worried."

Two women, the only other persons left in the hall, came down the aisle together, slowly, their heads turned to each other as they talked. They said Good Night to Susan and Anne when they passed their chairs. The noise of the doors

as they swung to behind them sounded loud in the empty hall. A deepened stillness followed.

Susan noticed it. " How quiet it always seems," she said, " when the people have all gone away."

Anne smiled. " Yes, that's what I feel myself."

" But it's a little sad."

" You find the stillness sad ? "

" Don't people always leave a kind of sadness behind ? "

" In a church, you mean ? "

" Anywhere where they have been. While they are here, it all seems so important—what they are saying and thinking and doing: but when they are gone, one sees how little difference they have really made. The stillness is all that is left of them ! "

" But," Anne suggested, " may not that be important, too ? "

Susan checked herself. Her real feeling had been expressed in what she had said, but it was a feeling due to her natural scepticism. At the point she had reached with Anne there was not much need for reticence—Anne knew well enough that her faith was not without serious flaws. On the other hand, at the point she had reached with herself her scepticism was not a thing to which she desired to give much prominence.

" The Discourse this evening," she said with a smile, " must have been just right for you."

Anne understood. She understood both Susan's smile and her " you." " For all of us, I hope," she said.

Susan shook her head. " For you much more than for most, I think."

Anne looked at her. The lights of the chandelier that hung nearest to them had been put out, and the hall at their end was dim. Anne's face was in shadow. It seemed to Susan that near as she was to Anne, she saw her face through a veil. She could not tell what the look Anne gave her meant.

" If that were true," Anne said, " I think it would be a pity."

" For him ? "

" For us. It's our loss, if we don't understand.

Susan turned her eyes away. She looked down the empty aisle, over the rows of disordered chairs, to where the pulpit with its two flights of steps loomed up through the furthest shadows. She saw it as she had seen it when John himself had stood there, a dignified, impressive figure, in his black gown and his cassock, his head bent over the book-rest as he glanced at the notes before him or turned the page of the book from which he read, or stood upright and intent, observing the rows of reverent expectant faces down the length of the well-lit hall. She knew what that hour had meant to him, that hour of intensified living, that hour in which his message was delivered, the great purpose of his life fulfilled. And all that was left of it now was the stillness and the shadows, and two tired, waiting women.

A poignancy of self-reproach crept over her. That hour was his justification. A man's work was a man's work, after all, and he had a right to give himself to it. A sense of the unimportance of her own life as compared with his took sudden possession of her ; she felt the pettiness of the demands she had made. She put another woman in her place. How proud another woman might be of him ! The sincerity of his convictions, the significance of his message, its value to the world, his gifts and his powers, his fine virile masterful presence—what these things would mean to a woman whose life was lived at the level of his ! And what might she not give in return !

" I almost think," Susan said, " that you understand better than any one—I mean, than any of the people I know."

Anne did not answer for a moment or two. When she did, Susan noticed a difference in her voice. " I try to understand," she said.

Susan smiled. " Oh, it's much more than that ! Just trying won't do it, you know."

Again Anne was slow to speak. Susan forbore to look at

her. She felt that Anne wished to say something for which words would not come very easily. " You don't think," the difference in Anne's voice had deepened, " it could be done by love ? "

Susan understood. Anne's voice, her quiet restraint and hesitation, taken with what she was likely to know about herself and John, showed Susan the application that Anne intended her to make. Anne was thinking of *her*. And so far was Susan from feeling resentment that she hardly cared even to put Anne off. " I don't know," she said, quite simply. " It is possible, perhaps. But I expect it's just as often the other way round."

Anne waited for her to finish it.

" Understanding may lead to love."

The suddenness of Anne's answer startled her. "It shouldn't ! "

" Shouldn't ? "

" It all sinks to a lower level when it does."

Susan's surprise became real astonishment. " But why ? I don't understand."

" It's what people say always happens."

Susan turned to Anne and looked at her. But Anne was looking away in the direction of the panelled wall. Her large figure was very still, but her hand played nervously with the key she held in her lap. Susan was troubled. Anne was evidently under the influence of an emotion for which Susan saw nothing to account. "Tell me what you mean," she said, very gently. "I really don't understand."

Anne at last turned her eyes to her. There was a strange unhappy look in them. " No. And I am glad you don't."

Susan was at a loss. " But why should you be glad ? "

To Susan's relief, Anne's manner changed. The troubling look went from her eyes, and much of her natural quiet returned to her. " I was thinking," she said, " of a different case. But I see your point, and I believe you're right. Understanding often has to come first."

" And why should you think love spoils it ? "

Anne smiled. " I don't ! "

" But you said just now— "

Anne held back a little. " Wouldn't you say that there may be cases— "

" —when love should be repressed ? "

" —when the understanding itself requires it."

Susan looked again down the aisle to where the pulpit loomed through the shadows. The thoughts of a few minutes before came back to her—the thought of John's fine masterful presence, his gifts and his manifold claims, and the thought of the response that another woman might make to them.

" Perhaps," she said. " But the woman ? If a woman *does* love, can she ' repress '— ? "

Anne's answer was long in coming. " It might be difficult for her," she said.

They were silent, and in their silence the hall seemed very still. Then, for Susan, the light quietly broke.

" Anne ! "

The door near the pulpit had opened.

" I think Mr. Hepworth is coming," Anne said.

PART VII

I

It had not taken Hepworth very long to discover that marriage is a difficult relation. It had not taken Susan very long either. But their difficulties were of different kinds. Hepworth was a good psychologist, but his interest hitherto had lain in principles rather than persons, and Susan was perhaps the first individual to whose mind he had been required to devote serious study. This had made things hard for him. For it is hard for a man, however good a psychologist he may be, when his first material for this exacting inquiry is the mind of his own wife.

It was not that Susan had at all disappointed him. He was not one of those men who discover that the women they have married are not the women they loved. He was not a man of headlong passions, and he could never have fallen in love with a woman unless he had also liked her. What he had liked in Susan before their marriage he liked still more when he came to know her better. He liked the atmosphere she created ; he liked what was modern in her, and was grateful for all that was not ; the amenities of her tradition appealed to him, for he had wished to marry a woman who had them. Her intelligence was sufficient for his needs. The men of his father's race had been hard self-reliant men, and though he himself was by no means hard, he had inherited their lack of a need for the intellectual companionship of women. He was ready to discuss his ideas as his fathers had never been ready to discuss their business ; but he had no preference for discussing them with women, and if he did so, it was chiefly because of late years manners have softened. He took women so much as human beings, and so little as women, that their companionship afforded him no distinctive pleasure. He was too strong both in body

and mind, too vigorous, too alive, too well, too deeply absorbed in his work and his various activities, to feel any marked desire for those softer things which some men expect women to give. Always, when it came to giving, he liked to be the giver himself. He liked to retain the superior position which giving confers on the giver. There were times, of course, when, being human, he would have been glad—or thought he would have been glad—if Susan had shared his ideas ; being irritable, there were times when he was provoked by her want of understanding of them : but in the long run no one could have suited him better. He couldn't do with people who had no independence of mind, and the degree in which Susan possessed it was just about right for his happiness. Her dissents and her qualifications, such ideas as she had, were quite intelligent enough, had quite enough in them, to give his mind something to work upon ; but there was not enough sound knowledge behind them for his position ever to be seriously threatened. To have a wife who does not pay too much attention to one's ideas may prove more restful in the end than to have a wife who shares them. He would not have cared to come home every day to an abler woman's reasoned antagonism.

No, Susan had not disappointed him. Even if she had, there was a loyalty in his nature and in his conception of the obligations of marriage that would have made him take a long time in finding it out. He had no real desire for the things that she could not give. The something in her, whatever it may have been, which had afforded him the distinctive pleasure which other women had failed to afford and raised pleasure to the point of love, remained—remained as a kind of fixed point in all that he thought and felt. Marriage for his loyal and disciplined nature had a certain effect of finality. The idea of marriage as an experiment or an adventure, a voyage of discovery, or a game at which two had to play, was entirely repugnant to him. Had been repugnant, that is, until he had taken a hand himself. Susan had not disappointed him, but she had made him

feel the force of some of these metaphors. He had taken too much for granted in her. A good many of his assumptions as to the working of her mind, inferences from the working of his own, were not justified by a more careful observation of the process. Her mind had recorded, and appeared to be recording still, impressions not at all like his. It moved in mysterious ways, to which—as in the case of Bertie's mind—his science provided no guide. But a mind may be difficult to follow without necessarily being difficult to live with. And, in the earlier years, he never found Susan *that*.

Her personality kept its charm for him ; he was always glad to come back to the amenities of the atmosphere she created. He liked to have her with him, he liked to take her about. It was a need of his nature to have some one to do things for, and he derived a peculiar enjoyment from doing small things for Susan. There was a touch of the woman in Hepworth, surprised as he would have been to hear it. He knew no times when, like Susan, he would have preferred to be with some one else. The relief, which in truth he did sometimes feel when he returned to the company of men, he did not recognise as relief. Most men are glad to have hours in which they can let themselves go. He found an especial delight in letting himself go, because both his body and mind were made for rapidity of movement : he loved to crowd on sail, to see the foam fly, to have all the stops out at once, to get all the sound he could. He enjoyed doing things in a hurry. Hence the comfort of Beale's companionship : leisureliness had no place in Beale's conception of dignity. It was not that with Susan he had to sit still and be good : Hepworth believed he was always good, and Susan, used to the ways of men (so much more used to the ways of men than he to the ways of women), was no martinet of manners. She was certainly not of the regiment of women who correct you and worry and fuss. She had kept house for a father and a brother, and her mind was free from domestic rigidities. But he felt she always *knew*—knew any number of little

things which had escaped his own observation. And he was sensitive to the advantage this gave her. If he had taken women a little more as women, and a little less as his fellow competitors, her gift of a feminine perception might have left his vanity untouched. It had been a good deal for her quietness that he had married her, and yet he resented the advantage which her quietness seemed to confer. There was the same contradiction, or at least the same difficulty, in what he called Susan's sense of humour. She was too good-natured, too glad of his lighter moods, perhaps too cheerful herself, not to meet him half way ; she laughed, whenever she could, at whatever he found amusing. But sometimes he saw that she did not laugh, and sometimes he wondered why. On the other hand, when they were with her family, or with the friends who belonged to her family connections, he was surprised at her understanding of a kind of humour for which his own seriousness was not prepared. The pleasantries themselves were not better than his own, but they contained a different reference. They told of a point of view, a way of taking things in general, to which his moral and social vision was not very easy to adjust. He listened to talk of this kind as one listens to an alien speech. But Susan understood quite easily. She understood, not because her wits were more nimble than his, but because this was her native language. At such times as these he had a sense of her passing away from him, of her having " gone back unto her people and unto her gods." And at times like these the Almighty—or his own more modern equivalent—appeared to have " dealt very bitterly " with him.

It was the work of the unkind years that, as their intimacy deepened, what at first he had seen only " at times like these " became an habitual perception. Susan did not go back unto her people and unto her gods : in spirit she had never left them. This settled perception proved a very different thing from the receiving of stray intimations. Of stray intimations his commonsense did not make too much. His respect for her independence was sincere, and some

measure of difference both of temperament and opinion was not unwelcome to him : disagreement quickened his sense of living. Even when he realised that her responsiveness, her interest, her readiness to take part in the activities of the Movement, the feeling she gave him of always being there when he wanted her—even when he realised that all this was not much more than a form of intelligent good nature, the discovery did not overwhelm him—though certainly he had hours of distress : after all, the responsiveness, the interest, the readiness, were nice things to have, a genuine proof of good will. But intimacy, as the years went by, revealed a deeper significance in their difference. She not only belonged to another race, but belonged to an alien race, and the social and moral values of that race were an intimate and essential part of her. She did not obtrude them upon him ; he fancied she rather tried to keep them out of sight ; they were so essential a part of her that he was not always quite sure how far she was conscious of them herself. But his own awareness penetrated all their intercourse. When once he had begun to listen, his ear was perpetually catching the accents of this alien speech with its hardly intelligible discriminations, its pervading scepticism, its reference of all things to a tradition of amenity as to a final court of appeal. And here matters would have been much simpler for him, if the amenities had appealed to him less. He rejected the jurisdiction of the court, but he was often on the side of its findings. He was betrayed by his own good taste into recognising the advantage that Susan's command of the reference gave her. He felt at times as a well-armed warrior might feel who found he could not use the weapon in his hand on account of some ridiculous net. Moreover, these alien people were a sceptical people ; their conservatism was not due to their possessiveness merely, it was due also to their want of faith—faith in the value of change, faith in mankind and the future. He knew that if Susan worked for his cause without being of it, it was because she had not faith enough in any cause to give it more than a

well-meaning interest. It always seemed to him that the more attention she gave to any conviction or cause, the more she discovered in it some probable element of illusion. The moments in which she was most serious were the moments in which her sense of the irony of things was deepest and most compassionate. This was what seriousness meant to her. And this to his virile intelligence with its wide range of profound and passionate conviction appeared little less than shocking. It appeared disquieting, too. Sometimes he imagined—was it pure fancy?—that the moments in which she felt most seriously about himself were moments in which she was sorry for him—in which her irony played. Both his pride and his intelligence were offended. His nature had a very sensitive side. His self-reliance was by no means the monumental thing that Susan supposed, and his sense of security was lessened. His sensitiveness made him defensive. This was why little things she said, things that to her seemed entirely devoid of any kind of unfriendly implication, provoked an unexpected irritation in him. His gift for linking things up, perceiving the hidden connection, had detected in these seemingly innocent little things the assumptions of that alien mind. This was why her fondness for the past and its ways, in itself innocent enough in all conscience, made him unreasonably jealous for the honour of the modern and the new.

He was sensitive, but his sensitiveness was not merely that of a pride too easily offended. It was the sensitiveness of a man whose perceptions were fine, and who looked well below the surface for the meaning of the things he saw. Somehow, little by little, in the course of the past year or so, and especially in the last six months, it had come to him that behind the differences of their habitual relations lay a new difference in Susan herself. To some extent it was a difference of manner. In her quiet way Susan had developed and matured. Aunt Jane—Susan and he had spent a week at Weyburn Court in September—had

conveyed her impression that Susan was destined to a not undistinguished place among the women of her distinguished family. Aunt Frances had said nice things one evening at the end of one of Susan's parties. Uncle Henry had repeated to Hepworth what he had said to Susan at the club. "Sue always had good looks," uncle Henry had told him. "Now, my dear John, she has beauty." Hepworth was pleased. He was tempted to tell these good people that their appreciation came a day after the fair—he had known all this from the beginning. But he was pleased—the more pleased because he entered into the pleasure which this appreciation gave Susan herself.

The difference that troubled him—troubled him more and more as the months went by—was a difference of inward disposition. Something natural and spontaneous had gone from her. It was not that he had lost the feeling she gave him of always being there when he wanted her. Her responsiveness, indeed, had deepened. She followed the work of the church, which had made great progress since the return of the builders in the spring, with an interest so genuine that at times he forgot—he had long forgiven—her want of any real faith. She had caught the idea of his spire, for instance, in a quite beautiful way! Her interpretation might be a trifle too mystical—perhaps a trifle too misty; sentimentality was a danger of which he had a constant dread: but he would have been glad if he could have endowed his followers in general with a little of Susan's imagination. And yet through it all he had a perception of an increased estrangement. The nicer she was to him, the further she seemed away. His sense of their differences changed to the sense of a widening and estranging distance. She appeared to be receding behind a barrier, a barrier at once insuperable and elusive, the barrier that is made by small things: a look, a smile, a reticence, an assent too readily given, the use or the turn of a phrase. Her interest had some new element in it—something deliberate, premeditated, almost, as it were,

something dutiful. What had once looked like a form of good nature had a look now of self-control. There were little things she no longer said, little unwisdoms that her presence of mind held back. One of the gains that the maturing years were bringing her was a personality with a firmer line.

These perceptions acquired a new definiteness, came, so to speak, to a head, when a scrap of talk one evening—a trivial little scrap in itself—gave him a possible clue. A Mrs. Davidson, an excellent woman but one overweighted with the consciousness of her own good deeds, had dined with them, and when she was gone, he had said to Susan :

" What a terrible person she is ! What can one do with people like that ? "

" All the same, you have given her a pleasant evening," Susan had said. " You went out of your way to be nice to her."

He had laughed. " What else can one do with people like that ! "

Susan had looked at him. " You, too ? " she had asked.

" I, too ? "

" Feel that one has to make it up to people."

" For finding them terrible ? "

Susan had smiled. " Oh, they needn't be so bad as all that ! "

He had laughed—they both had laughed ; and they had talked of other things. But a little later, when Susan had picked up a book, and he was on the point of going to the library, of a sudden this scrap of talk came back. Their phrases came back, Susan's smile, Susan's look, came back. Certainly, the idea had been his—with his " What else can one do ! " But how readily, how perfectly, she had understood ! He remembered her smile and her look, and he saw how much the idea had meant to her. Was it this that she was doing herself?—making it up—making it up to *him* ? But if so, for what ? For nothing she had done, he was certain. It must be for something she felt. Was it by

any chance possible that she found *him* . . . a terrible person?

A few months ago, a few weeks ago, he could have laughed the thing off quite easily. The idea was absurd, the phrase absurd, and he would humorously have taxed her with it. He would have had the whole joke out with her. . . . To-night—he couldn't. Some virtue, some power, had gone from him. He was afraid. He dare not make the plunge, he dare not take the risk. He was afraid. He was afraid of Susan—afraid of her power to hurt him. At that moment it seemed to him that she was the stronger of the two.

II

He suffered.

He had awakened many anatagonisms in his time, but no one, on whose affections he had so deep a claim, had ever dealt so cruel a blow. Susan had turned against him. As the weeks went by, he put the matter with a more and more simple directness : he said to himself, " She hates me."

His suffering did not appear. His work went on as usual. The hours in his room at the hall were hours of profitable labour, and if his Discourses were prepared with less concentration, they were delivered with more intensity. Only Beale, who watched him with the eye of affection, and with whom he lived at very close quarters, suspected that all was not well. The work went on as usual, but there was now a new element in it. He worked with a sense of escape. He knew what he would have to face the moment the work was over. The lecture delivered, the page written, the letter answered, the discussion ended, the caller dismissed, and back the wretchedness of his preoccupation came. The need to think and to think—think clearly, think the thing out—was a fixed idea that possessed him. This was his way of meeting his trouble. Sometimes, when Beale had left him, he would wander into the hall itself, and pace up and down, alone in the dimness, miserably thinking and thinking. Now and then he walked home—walked the whole way—just in order to have the chance to think. The hours he thought in his library. . . .

He made his thinking as honest as he could.

He lived again through the years of his marriage. He let memory do all that it would for him, and each incident and scene that came back—and he tried not to choose between the incidents he would have preferred to forget and those

he was glad to remember—he examined with all the detachment in his power. He was helped in this stern task by his habit of self-examination. Though none of his friends were aware of it, he practised an inward discipline. The appeal to the social conscience had so prominent a place in his preaching that how much for Hepworth himself his religion held of true inwardness few of his followers understood. But in these dedicated hours when quietness and silence possessed him he heard voices that were not very modern—and were very far from being contemporary. The works of modern wisdom and knowledge were not the only works in his library ; the volumes of older explorers of human experiences, of older physicians of the soul, had a place beside them on his shelves. The *Imitation* was a book to which he very often returned. Indeed, it was possible that these were the pages in which his spirit came most to rest. Did not the real value of recent discoveries lie in the justification they afforded for the importance he attached to old needs ?

Now, in this crisis of his life with Susan, he made the best use he could of his stern inward practice. He tried very honestly to discover wherein he had failed and offended. Had he taken any unfair advantage of her, used any undue influence, sought to impose his ideas ? Memory appeared to acquit him. Susan had kept a complete independence, and had given some proof of it in the dissent she sometimes expressed. He believed the help she had given him in various ways—in calling on people, in entertaining every one he wished to see—had been given without reluctance. He was sure he had never asked her to change a habit, or to give anything up, or undertake any kind of work for which—so far as he knew—she had shown a real distaste. Even in the matter, as to which he was inclined to be most uncertain, he could feel no self-reproach. It was the matter of Bertie and the child. His dislike of this episode had persisted ; it stood for a difference which both Susan and he avowed. But had not his promise

to Bertie been fully and faithfully kept? Could it have been kept more faithfully? Susan went to see Elsie, and Kitty often came to Hampstead. He could remember an afternoon when he had driven to Notting Hill himself (it was there that Elsie and her husband lived), and had brought back the child with him in the car. Susan had played with Kitty in the garden, and he had come out and played with her too. Kitty and he had had their usual game with the bird bath. He remembered the journey home. Susan and he had dined out that night, and had taken Notting Hill on the way. To save Susan's dress, he had kept Kitty on his knee. Her hair, which was a trifle greasy, had not been good for his shirt front.

Hepworth's evocations were not often of this vivid and trivial kind, for the scenes of the past seldom returned in more than generalised impressions. But in whatever way the past returned, it seemed to him that the more he recovered of it, the less he really understood. His miserable question "What have I done?" remained miserably unanswered. The whole weary business—all this torturing process of remembering and weighing, living it all over again, trying to be honest and fair—proved an unprofitable torment. Nevertheless, the question was answered at last. It may have been that the sheer misery of it forced an answer upon him, or perhaps it was that the old belief in his general rightness survived and tilted the balance in his favour. He decided that nothing he had done would account for her turning against him. But the alternative, which this decision left, made the blow much more cruel. Susan disliked him for what he was.

With this conviction he entered a new and a still more tormenting phase.

He had awakened plenty of antagonisms in his time. The joy of battle, or the joy of losing one's temper, had usually dulled his first compunction. But afterwards he was always sorry. He had performed many little acts of a kindly and generous contrition. He did his best to make it

up with people whom he feared he had hurt or offended, and would even—the fatal phrase !—try to make it up to them. The misunderstandings which would not yield to his generous advances he believed to have been rightly incurred. There were a good many people in the world whom the just man did well to offend. But it was one thing to arouse antagonisms consciously, for the sake of a conviction or a cause, in the course—so to speak—of one's professional obligations, and quite another to arouse them unconsciously, simply by being what one was. To do this was a great misfortune. To have a personality which made people dislike you, however good to them you might be, was a calamity beyond relief. Was he among these unfortunate persons ? The idea that he might be shook his whole conception of himself. And the idea that he might be passed, little by little, into a definite fear that he was. If Susan—Susan in whom devotion to those with a claim upon her was so conspicuous a trait—felt in this way about him, there must be a great many other people. . . . What of the antagonisms of the past ? He had attributed most of them to dislike of his ideas or opinions : but what if they were due to dislike of himself ? All sense of security left him. His self-respect and his self-esteem received the very cruellest of blows. Without some measure of confidence in the impression he makes on people, how can any man face the world ? How can any man live with his fellows ? To go through life inspiring an instinctive antipathy was to live under an impossible curse. It was no use to be kind, no use to show affection. The antipathy was there whatever you might say or do. Hepworth felt like a man who has discovered in himself the taint of some repulsive malady. No one avoided him, it was true, but everybody kept his distance. To be openly shunned, like a leper of old, would have been a less intolerable fate, for the leper knew where he was. It was an intimate part of Hepworth's misery that there was now no one whom he could trust. No one of whom he could feel quite sure. What had he left to go

upon ? When people were nice to him, they merely awakened misgiving. He knew far too well what being nice might mean. He had moments of fierce recoil when he hated the people who were nice. To the others he could at least stand up and feel like a man among men. But the people who smiled and were pleasant. . . . An immeasurable loneliness descended upon him, and he was possessed by a terror of life.

But Hepworth was a great fighter, and both his egoism and his courage rebelled. He began once more to ask questions, and he asked the most important of all : was it true ? Susan might feel in this way about him, but was it true that other people shared her feeling ? He thought of his followers and his friends. Was the devotion he believed he had inspired nothing more than a pure delusion ? Had there been no real affection in any of the innumerable friendships he had known ? He thought of the life of his old home in the North, of his family, his father, his mother : had he never been really loved ? Commonsense came to his rescue, and he dismissed a conspiracy of deception on the part of his family and his friends as too absurd to be seriously considered. The success of his work, the position he held in the world, were proof enough that the worst of his fears were groundless. It might be that a shade of misgiving remained, but commonsense had the last word.

He had hours of great bitterness, hours of very fierce revolt, but against Susan herself, whose hand had dealt the blow, he felt very little resentment. Or rather the resentment he felt at first passed into other emotions. His egoism worked in its own peculiar way to make the pain less intolerable. It adopted protective measures. His impression of Susan was falsified. So long as they were together, her face, her voice, her little habits and tricks of manner, kept their old familiarity for him. But in the hours of his lonely thinking odd little falsifications would creep into his memory of her, and, mentally, he saw her as other than

she was. He exaggerated the differences that her family had noticed too, and bringing into play his gift for linking things up, he drew inferences quite fantastic. As he had once made the mistake of taking too much for granted in her, he now—without knowing it—made the mistake of taking too little. He endowed her with qualities she did not possess. She had attained to no such self-control, was to no such extent superior to the accidents of the moment and the mood, as his imagination supposed. He magnified the self-confidence which time and a larger experience had given her, and she became for him not merely a product of her tradition and her race, but a product wonderfully finished and impressive ! He thought of Susan sometimes almost in the terms in which Susan thought of aunt Jane. The things Susan knew seemed more important than ever. He had moments of marvellous perception when she shone with the radiance of some *grande dame* of legend—moments when Susan was probably doing no more than her duty to the guests at the other end of his table. But in these falsifications he found an obscure relief. His respect for her had sensibly deepened. With the recognition of her power to hurt him, the ascendency passed from his hands. He evaded the admission as long as he could, but he was definitely afraid of her judgment. He exaggerated his losses, and magnified her gains, until he really believed that hers was the stronger will. And to excuse to himself this loss of ground by investing her with these rather formidable qualities was a comfort to his suffering egoism. The more pride in Susan he could feel, the less the injury she had inflicted pained him. One of his later discoveries, too, afforded him a measure of comfort—the discovery that women were women. Some allowance might fairly be made for the fact that Susan was a woman. He modified a famous phrase, and came to cherish a suspicion that Woman would be " the last thing " to be caught in the psychologist's toils. On the day when this genial fancy occurred to him he moulted another humanitarian feather, and in

consequence became more human. He could see himself as the victim of what, after all, was an admittedly incalculable state.

If Hepworth had been all egoism, or if Hepworth had been all intelligence, he would have attained, no doubt, thanks to his commonsense and his courage (to say nothing of his egoism itself), to some adjustment to a situation for which men, much less reasonable and less generous than he, have devised a working philosophy. But Hepworth was sensitive and emotional ; he had imagination and a conscience, and the very simple sin of making people unhappy was one he seldom forgave. He knew well enough that Susan was suffering too. And the knowledge haunted and tortured him. It hurt like a physical pain. It was lying in wait for him at every turn of his thought. It was the point to which, through all his reasoning and remembering, his desire for self-justification and his attempt to be fair, his thinking always brought him back. And when he did come back to it, his thinking, so to speak, broke down. He could do nothing but feel. He forgot what the failure of their marriage meant to him, and was possessed by an overwhelming sense of what it must mean to Susan.

And there was nothing that he could do. One course only would have met their case, and it was impossible for him to take it. He could not make her love him. He could not even being to try. Something deep in his nature, some sober inheritance from his deeply Puritan tradition, always held him back. To try to overcome her dislike by anything that could have the appearance of an appeal to the senses, or of even too marked an appeal to the emotions, was an offence to personal dignity—her dignity as much as his. The kind of respect he had for women made him respect her dislike. Here, too, she must be free. It was a matter of instinctive feeling more than of anything else, but he reasoned it into a point of honour, and it grew to be a point of pride. He couldn't begin, he couldn't take the simplest step ; and the more, of course, he let his reluctance master him, the more

unapproachable Susan appeared. His temperament stood in his way. He had no gift for small endearments, no impulse to do any of those little foolish trivial things that are in fact so far from foolish ; he shrank from both caressing and being caressed. Those more tender intimacies that are born of weakness and the confession of need, that depend on the dropping of all high claims, the letting of the last desire to impress and impose die away, were not for a man to whom the admission of weakness meant a sacrifice of personal integrity. He could take none of the simpler steps, and the course he did take only led him further astray. He tried to play up to Susan. He attempted to meet what he imagined her requirements to be. He controlled his impatience, he controlled his temper, and toned the exuberance of his manner down. He exaggerated the attention he paid to minor courtesies and amenities. He sought to be a little more leisurely, to avoid over-emphasis, over-insistence, to make his tone as light as he could. He endeavoured to prove that he too, if he chose, could assume the air of a man of the world. That Susan saw and understood these attempts of his, and that they often hurt her quite cruelly, he had of course no means of knowing. On the other hand, there was a falling off in the small things that he had delighted in doing for her. To see her opening the parcel of some little present, or trying to show how pleased she was at the thought of a First Night stall, gave him a stab of peculiar poignancy. He knew she was not so pleased as all that. . . .

More and more his thinking and his reasoning failed as the hard months went by. It was not that his brain grew tired, and conclusions more difficult to reach ; it was, just simply, that feeling gained the upper hand. He was haunted more and more by the sense of what the failure of their marriage must mean to her. In the dimness of the hall, in the dreariness of the streets on his long walks home, her presence was constantly with him ; and it was less and less the presence of that impressive and rather forbidding woman of the world whom his falsifications had created,

and became instead the presence of the responsive, interested, affectionate girl whom he had admired and wanted and married. It was the disappointment of this younger Susan that tortured him, and the more vividly he realised the extent of her loss, the younger for his imagination she became. What he had done to her, what he must be doing now, seemed the one thing he cared to think about. It was the paradox of his masterful nature that his life was essentially disinterested. He had not lived for himself at all. Inwardly, he was detached—detached, in the true inward way of the saint and the mystic, from his own claim to personal happiness. And at the bottom of it all there lay a very simple and human thing—his natural and abiding kindness.

III

It was the morning of the fourth day after that Sunday evening on which Susan and Anne had had their talk in the quiet of the empty hall.

Each day Hepworth had penetrated the dreary tract of South London in which Anne's nephew lived, and had spent many hours by his bed. The misgiving with which Anne had left Charlie that Sunday afternoon had afforded a true intimation. The doctor had declared the next time he called that the case was one of pneumonia. Hepworth had not spared himself on these visits. He had relieved the dinginess of the young man's lodgings with many wise little comforts ; he had lightened Anne's labours by procuring a nurse from an organisation in the district ; and he had managed to convert the landlady—much his most difficult task—into a comparatively civilised woman. On the previous evening he had gone early, and had remained all night. He had waited for the end to come.

It was still dark when Hepworth reached his own house at Hampstead. The lamps were still burning in the road. On his way from the Tube, he noticed lights behind the blinds of upper windows, or in the fanlights of dark front doors, but the only persons he had seen were a small boy pushing newspapers into letter boxes that refused to take them in, and a milkman pushing a jingling barrow. The December air was damp and mild, and the lamps shone through a mistiness made faintly blue by a high but invisible moon.

All the windows of Hepworth's house were dark. The hall received him, when he let himself in, with the sheltered stillness of the long deep hours of night. None of the maids had yet come down. He switched on the light, and hung up

his hat and coat. After the scenes of his recent experience it seemed, as he looked at familiar things, a long time since he had left them.

He went to the library door. He expected to find the room in darkness, but was greeted by a dim glow of firelight from the hearth, and the shaded lamp was alight on his table. He paused for a moment at the door. His own forgetfulness might account for the lamp, but the fire was more difficult to explain. Though its embers were burning low, it must have been made up at some time long after midnight. He laid on the table a book he had taken with him. He had raised his hand to turn out the lamp, when he was startled by another discovery. In one of the deep armchairs by the fire, her face turned from the shaded light, in the dress she had worn that evening at a dance, lay Susan, very fast asleep.

He was reluctant to wake her, but he could not let her sleep on.

"Susan!"

Susan stirred.

"Susan!" he repeated.

She opened her eyes—very sleepily. "Is that you, John?"

"Yes. I have just come back."

She lifted her head. "What time is it?"

"I don't know—my watch has stopped. I forgot to wind it up last night. It was dark when I came in. The maids are not down yet. But why in the world haven't you gone to bed?"

Susan sat up in the chair. "It does look, doesn't it, as if I had been making rather a night of it? But, you see," she explained, "I did not leave the Willoughbys till nearly three, and when I got back I came in here, and found a few sparks still alive. I coaxed them up. I thought you would be coming soon, and it is nice to find a fire. Then I made myself some Ovaltine—Fanny had left the spirit lamp; and had something to eat. By that time the fire looked cosy, and I thought I would wait a little longer to see whether you came. The fire evidently proved *too* cosy. . . ."

" You had my message ? "

" Yes—that was why I expected you earlier. The nurse—she said she was the nurse—rang me up before I went to the Willoughbys. She told me you thought the end was very near."

" I asked her to telephone to you. I sent her home. She is ill herself. I suspect it is influenza. There was nothing to be done that Miss Burrows and I could not do."

" And the end—*has* come ? " Susan asked.

" Yes. He died about two hours ago. Miss Burrows did what was necessary, and then came back with me. We took the Tube from the Elephant and Castle. I could not find a taxi."

Susan looked at him. He had taken another armchair on the other side of the fire. " You must be very tired," she said.

" No, I don't feel tired—but it has been terrible."

" He suffered a great deal ? "

" Not at the last. But it has been most distressing."

" I am glad you were with him," Susan said.

" I could do nothing."

" But how much you had done before ! "

John made no answer. If he was not feeling tired, it was only because, Susan knew, the strain was still keeping him up. He looked very tired indeed. She was glad she had waited for him.

" You would like some tea," she said. " Some one must surely have come down by this time. I will ring and see." She got up and rang the bell.

John still said nothing. Susan paused on the hearthrug, and stood for a moment looking at him. He was sitting all huddled up in his chair. " Huddled " was seldom the word for his massive and vigorous figure, which usually kept some suggestion of energy however relaxed his attitude might be : but even this last suggestion had gone from him, and his weariness seemed complete. Only—there were his eyes. They told her why he had said just now that he was not

feeling tired. One didn't—when one's eyes had a look like that ! But they also told her something more—or rather they reminded her of something different. Intimately as in most ways she fancied she knew him, there were moments—and the present was one of them—when she was conscious of how much there was, so to speak, left over which her perceptions had never yet reached.

She put a few coals on the fire, and went back to her chair.

John was still silent.

He was looking into his shadows behind her. She was sitting with her back to the large curtained window, and that end of the room was deep in a dim obscurity. The shaded lamp on the table made only a small pool of brightness. His silence seemed to her not quite natural, for it was his way to talk of things by which he had been deeply moved. He had told her so much of his other visits that he had made the experience vivid. He had told her of his walks through the sordid streets between the Tube and Charlie's lodgings—of the empty afternoon quiet in the hours when the men were at work and the children at school and the dingy doors of the small mean houses were all monotonously closed. He had told her about Charlie's house—how it faced the premises of a proprietor of costers' barrows, upon a strange gathering of which Charlie's upper room looked down. Thanks to the well-chosen curtains of the sitting-room window and the plants that stood between them, the house had an air of its own : it offered itself as a bright spot of middle class propriety in a region deficient in standards. But against the interior, with its dinginess and its darkness and its smells, John's senses greatly protested. She could imagine the effect upon him of entering that dreadful passage, of mounting those dreadful stairs. She could picture Charlie's bed-sitting-room, stuffy, undusted, ill-furnished, full of things mended and mean. Certainly, it had been good of John to go. It had been rather more than good of him to go so often, and stay so long, and do for this quite

unattractive young man all that she knew he had done. She thought of the men with whom she had danced that evening. How many of them ever did a thing like this? And upon John you could always count to do such things as these. But that was not the real point of it, either. The point of it was that Charlie had wanted him—wanted him more than he had wanted any one else. What John had been to Charlie impressed her much more than even what John had done for him. To be wanted like this, when it came to the last, provided a pretty good test. To be able to satisfy a need so deep you must have depths of your own to draw upon. It was the sort of test that Susan especially cared for, the sort of test she would have liked to believe that she herself could satisfy. She looked at John at that moment as you look at one who has had some experience, performed some feat, who possesses some power, which puts him a little apart. Was this the meaning of that something left over which she knew she had never yet reached? For an instant she fancied it might be ; but some deeper perception said No. That he had performed the feat, that he possessed the power—that she quite understood ; but the experience had an element in it which she did not understand. What had it really meant to him? Just how much, in fact, did anything really mean to him? It seemed to her that if ever you were to get your ideas of people straight, you must find a final something in them on which those ideas could rest. What was this final something in John? It was the point that always eluded her. She never could get her ideas of him straight. She could never make up her mind which side of him counted for most. Was he still thinking of Charlie? She was almost sure he was not. Already his mind had moved on. She knew she was being unreasonable—possibly being absurd ; but she shrank from his moving on. However deeply he had been stirred, always he seemed to move on....

Presently the cook appeared bringing with her the tea. She had been in the kitchen when the master had let himself in, and had guessed why (as she supposed) he had

rung the bell. For the sight of Susan she was quite unprepared. Cook was an old friend—she had stood by them through all the domestic vicissitudes of the War ; and Susan told her how she came to be there.

" I do feel rather dissipated," she said. To which she added, " Will you bring another cup for *me* ? "

When cook had left them to fetch it, Susan's thoughts took a different turn. She remembered Anne. And the thought of Anne had the effect of bringing before her the scene in Charlie's room : she could feel the waiting and watching of the slow dim night hours, see the dying face on the pillow between the two kind bending figures. What that night must have meant to Anne ! . . .

She had thought a great deal of Anne in the course of the last three days. She had found it difficult at first to know just what to think. There were probably ways in which a woman, who had made a discovery like hers, would be expected to think and feel : but did one ever feel about anything as one was expected to feel, or as—could the experience have been foreseen—one would oneself have expected to feel ? The real effect of her discovery had been to bring Anne very near. They had reached a very strange understanding in the shadows of the empty hall. All the little outward things, with which hitherto they had been concerned, had suddenly become unimportant. Their next meeting might have some difficult moments—though Susan hardly thought that it would ; but what Anne might say to her, or she might say to Anne, would not matter much when, below it, lay an understanding of such importance. The more Susan thought about it, the more it appeared to her that she had been given a secret to share. She had received a confidence even more than made a discovery. The look in Anne's face had told of a dreadful conflict. It was a tragic thing that had happened to her. Indeed what more tragic thing could happen to a woman with Anne's depth and delicacy of nature ? But there was another and more intimate way in which Anne had drawn

near. The intimacies of Anne's life looked—with a difference—very like the intimacies of her own. She could no longer think of John with reference only to herself; Anne had a claim to be thought of, too. This was how it worked out: she had a troubled, haunting sense that Anne had a moral claim. If you took daily life for your measure, the distance between them was immense, the distance between John and Anne; but if the things of the spirit provided your measure, if understanding, faith, fidelity, love, provided your test of a claim, then, Susan felt, it was Anne, and not she, who had the deeper right to count as John's true partner.

Cook reappeared with a cup and saucer, and with more bread and butter on a plate. When Susan had poured out her tea, and returned to her chair by the fire, John at last broke silence.

"Why did you wait up for me?" he asked.

Susan was a little surprised. "I suppose I felt I should like to!"

"But why?"

"'Why—?'"

"It was rather a nice thing to do, you know."

Susan looked at him. Just what did he mean, she wondered. Was this why he had been so silent? Was it to *her* that his mind had been moving on? "Don't I do nice things?" she asked.

"Too many."

She was perplexed. She was, too, a little uneasy. His tone was quite unnatural; it was not like him to put things in this indirect, obscure sort of way. "I don't understand," she said.

She waited for his next words, but he was slow to speak. This, too, was not at all like him. When he had something to say, he could be trusted to say it. How much, at that moment, he must have to say was shown by his holding back. And it was of *her* that he could not speak! He had, of course, been thinking of her all the time. "What is it, John?" she asked.

He smiled. And she was conscious of a still deeper strangeness in him.

" Tell me," she said.

He was looking again into the shadows behind her. Their usual positions were reversed. It was he, this time, who was holding back—to whom the difficult words would not come. She was conscious of a slight ascendency.

" Is it anything I have done ? "

" No."

She could not press him further. In the dim light of the fire, she could not see his face as she had seen it when she had stood on the rug and looked down at him ; but there was light enough for her to see that his eyes had the same unnatural strain. She had expected no such turn as this !

She got up, and put her cup on the tray. To relieve the tension a little, she changed her seat. She moved to the revolving chair, which stood opposite the blotting-pad on the table, and turned it towards the fire.

It was as if this trifling change of position had made some difference in John. At last he spoke.

" It is not you," he said. " It is I."

" Who have done something ? "

He waited just a moment. " I have never made you happy."

" John ! "

It was a cry of pure surprise. She was entirely unprepared for any such admission as this. She felt an utter dismay. He knew ! All her efforts had gone for nothing—he knew ! An utter dismay possessed her. The truth she had tried so hard to conceal stood there naked between them. And her first impulse was to try to shield and to spare him, to save whatever she could. She wanted to sweep the whole thing away with a complete and absolute denial. But no words of denial came to her. It was just too absolutely true ! The sheer truth of it seemed to paralyse her. The truth was all she could see and feel. Then, subtly, as she waited, blending with her dismay and her desire to spare him, came the

thought of herself. She was conscious of something brought suddenly within her reach. It was as if a burden were about to be lifted. It was as if a door, long bolted and barred, were about to open and admit her to a world beyond.

She spoke almost involuntarily. " No," she said.

When she had said it, she felt an extraordinary relief.

" You have never been happy with me."

It was as if a demon of truth drove her on. " No."

" Not from the first."

" No."

" And of late—"

She felt no desire to soften it. " It has been worse," she said.

He was silent again.

The relief was quite extraordinary. She had done all that she could to hide and conceal the truth. She had followed uncle Henry's wise counsel, and done her utmost to " keep it up." She had practised self-control until it had almost become a fine art. But she realised at this moment how intensely, all the time, in her heart of hearts, she had wanted these things to be said. She realised as never before what the repressions of these years had cost her. She saw with a sudden and marvellous clearness how unnatural her life had been. Her relief was so acute that it was like a physical sensation. Somewhere, far down in her, the idea of John still lurked ; but for the moment she could not think of him.

She got up from the revolving chair. She went towards the curtained window—meaning perhaps to draw the curtains back. She turned away before she had reached it. She paced slowly past the bookshelves in the direction of the cabinet by the door. She paused before the bust of Savonarola, white in these further shadows. He looked to her oddly different. Somehow he looked absurd. He, too, in his day, had been a great preacher of repression—and she knew enough about that ! She knew where such preaching left you. As she went back past the shelves again, the books, in their turn, caused her a vague irritation. The things

these modern people believed in were quite as absurd in their way. Life was against them all. She felt hard—incredibly hard and bitter. She could see how it was that people came to be cruel—how cruelty might be a delight. And it was just this thought that checked her.

Once more she sank into the deep armchair.

John had not moved. He was sitting in the same position, his figure had just the same look. The fire was burning more brightly, and she could see him better. His face appeared more than strained and tired; it seemed to her drawn with pain. Her relief began to fade. The old claims were stealing back again, the old life was still there. The door had not opened very wide.

He spoke to her.

"I ought to have known," he said. "Your world is very different from mine."

"You have come to see that I have a world?"

"I ought always to have seen."

"Perhaps. But I am not quite sure. Some things are not easy to see."

"I had had more experience."

"No, John. Not of a kind to help you."

He considered a moment. "I think you are right," he said.

"We mustn't forget aunt Frances, you know."

"Aunt Frances?"

"It was in *her* world that we met."

"And her world was not yours?"

"Oh yes, that was the trouble. In a way it was my world. For the time being it was. I was very happy with her. I was interested. I liked meeting the people she knew. I liked doing the work I did for her. It was there that her special gift came in. She made you so much interested in what you did that you took your believing in it for granted. I did not know whether I believed or not. And if I did not know how could you?"

"I never doubted," he said.

"But all the time there was Hildon Place. You had scarcely heard of Hildon Place until we became engaged."

"You may have mentioned it, perhaps. I don't remember."

"Yet my whole life had been lived there! It was a good deal to leave out, don't you think?"

"If you had told me more it would have made no difference."

"Ah, that's very generous of you."

"It is true."

"No, John, it would have made all the difference in the world. If we had met anywhere else, anywhere outside the world of aunt Frances, the idea of marrying would never have occurred to either of us."

"Isn't that," he said, "rather a terrible thing to say?"

"It's only the truth. And it's very much to your credit."

"Why to my credit?"

"You would have thought of me."

"Of you?"

"Of my happiness as well as your own.

"Don't most men think—?"

"No, neither men nor women think. They take the other person's happiness for granted."

"You believe they are so selfish as that?"

"They are not selfish. It's only that they are in love."

The idea came quickly to him. "Then you mean—"

"Oh, John, I am trying to be fair."

"But you mean—"

"Oh, never mind what I mean! Let us leave it at that!"

"You mean I did not love you!"

The hardness had quite gone from her. She did wish now to soften it as much as she could. "You have always been very good to me."

"But you believe I have never loved you."

"No"—she tried to evade the admission—"it's not quite that. I think love is a thing that does not appeal to you much. You often preach against it, you know."

" Only when it makes us—as you say it does—indifferent to other people's happiness."

The old irony crept back in spite of her. " There's no fear of its making you that."

He felt the irony. " *Are* you being quite fair ? "

" I am certainly being ungrateful."

She saw that the word hurt him. " And stupid," she added.

" No," he demurred.

" But it's so strange that we should be saying these things. After so many years ! "

" It is time they were said," he told her.

" But what has happened ? What made you . . . speak as you did just now ? "

" I have known for some time," he said.

" Have I seemed to you different ? "

" Yes, in a good many ways."

She smiled. " Every one appears to feel that about me," she said.

" I have become more conscious of your antagonism."

She shrank from the word, but felt it would be wiser to accept it. " Yes, it's true, I am afraid."

" But why ? "

She seemed at last to have reached the edge. And there was a plunge that she saw she could not take. She repeated, feebly, " I have been very stupid."

" No," he said, " that won't help us much. Tell me."

The words broke from her like a cry. " Oh, how can I ? Every word I say will only put me more hopelessly in the wrong. You have been so awfully good to me ! "

" It is not my work ? "

" No. I am not so stupid as that."

" It is not the church, for instance ? I have not been boring you with it ? "

" The building interests me quite immensely ! "

" It is not anything connected with the Movement ? "

" I only wish I could have been of more use."

" It is nothing, in fact, I have done."

" Haven't I said how awfully good you have been to me ! "

" Then it is what I thought."

" And what have you thought ? "

" The fault lies in me."

" In you ? "

" The fault lies in myself."

" I don't understand."

" It is something in me you dislike."

" John ! "

A minute or two went by.

The truth had prevailed at last. The things she had wanted to have said, all the whole array of them, right down to the truest of all, had been said for her at last. And this time there was no relief. She could see and could feel nothing whatever but the misery of it all for him.

" No, John, don't say that," she pleaded.

" But if it's true. . . ."

" We are only hurting one another."

" It is all you have done not to hurt me," he said, " that has hurt me most."

" What else could I do ? I have had so little excuse."

" For hurting me ? "

" No. I have had none at all for that. For not being happy I mean. So I think most people would say."

" They would be wrong all the same, these people."

" You defend me against yourself ? "

" There's no need of defence. It is a terrible thing to have made a mistake like yours."

" Don't, John," she pleaded. " You do hurt me dreadfully."

She had been looking at him. Now she turned her eyes away, and gazed into the brightening fire.

" You make it seem very strange," she said.

" Strange ? "

" That I should not have been happy. That I should have felt as I admit I have."

He smiled. " Perhaps you have not always been quite fair ? "

" It doesn't look quite as if I had ! "

" But it does not seem to me strange," he said. " At first, I confess, it did. I found it hard to believe that you could feel in this way about me. I found it hard to accept my failure. And there is still much that I don't understand . . . for which I can find no reason. But it no longer seems to me strange that you should not have been happy. The differences between us are terrible."

" It was my fault that you did not see that from the first," she said. " I was sailing under false colours."

" I should have been more observant."

" You hadn't had the experience, John."

" No. I had lived in a different world. Your world was quite unknown to me."

" You had never known any one, had you, John, like George and Bertie and me ? "

" No one," he said, " with values so essentially different."

" That's because we are ordinary people. The people you are accustomed to are all more or less exceptional."

" In what way, do you mean ? "

" Aren't most of your personal friends rather well-known people ? People with your kind of enthusiasm—your kind of intellectual interests ? They are all too important to be ordinary."

" But the members of our Society—are they too important ? "

" No—but they are much too nice ! To say nothing of their being much too interesting ! I'm the first ordinary person with whom you have ever been at all intimate."

" That's a nice way of putting it," he said, " but there are deeper differences than these."

" Can there be ? "

" Yes. Differences of tradition go deep, but those of temperament go still deeper."

" Ah ! " The exclamation was quite involuntary.

" Your antagonism has nothing mean or selfish about it. I should have suffered less if it had. The fault lies in me. Your antagonism is a form of self-defence."

Once more she had the truth to face. " There *has* been something, I think. Something I have wanted to keep."

" Yes—faith with yourself," he said. " Faith with the best within you."

The phrase had a note that jarred on her. "Oh, John," she said, " leave out that. . . ."

He hurried on. " And it has been the desire of my life to help you to keep it—to make you feel you were free—free in every possible way. The tragedy is I have failed."

It was as if, quite suddenly, her attention began to wander.

They were words she had never believed she would hear him say, and yet she had a peculiar feeling that she had heard him say them before, as people sometimes, in some new place, have the sense of a previous visit. The scene appeared to her familiar, natural, expected, and yet entirely unreal.

In a moment or two she recovered. The pity of it wrung her heart intolerably—she could have cried out with pain. And still something within her seemed to be holding her back. It was as if behind the intensity of her feeling there lay a kind of numbness. She knew that even now, in this moment of desperate intimacy between them, there was something in her that he had not really reached. There was something—a word, a tone, a look, a gesture, she knew not what—which she yearned to have him give her, and which he did not give.

" I have had all the freedom I have wanted," she said. " If it is freedom of mind you mean. The tragic part of it is, it seems to me, that our minds have so little to do with it."

" But reason should have some say in the matter, don't you think ? "

" Oh, reason ! " she echoed " Reason ! Who ever has enough for two ? "

" Two ? "

" It takes two to make a quarrel, they say. It's there being two that makes a tragedy."

To which she added a moment later, " But we have talked enough about me. It is time we thought of you."

" It is *your* disappointment," he said.

The tears came to her eyes. " Isn't it yours as well ? "

" Only," he said, " because I have not made you happy."

She sank back in her chair.

Her eyes happened to rest on a picture which, though its subject was quite lost in the shadows, she knew to be the water colour drawing of John's old home in the North. Somehow, it made her think of his mother. And, somehow, the thought of his mother had the effect of recalling his work.

" And your work ? " she asked.

The question surprised him. " My work ? "

" Has it suffered ? "

He hesitated before he answered her. " No," he said.

" It mustn't ! It's really what matters most."

That he let this pass escaped her.

But the words repeated themselves in her brain. " It's really what matters most." And as the words repeated themselves, her thought took a further step. Might she not have said with equal truth, " It's all that matters very much " ?

She sat very still indeed.

His sincerity was beyond all question. All that was strange and unnatural in him told of what he was going through. She felt the generosity of every word he had said. She realised that she had been wrong : it was not on his egoism alone that the dreadful blow had fallen. And yet intensely as she was aware of what these moments meant to him, another of her old ideas crept back. With the thought of any such hour as this had always gone the thought of his recovering from it. Had she been wrong here, too ? The misery of the old misgiving seized her. Always he *did* move

on ! Always the sheer force of his immense vitality swept him on to another phase !

She rose to her feet. The strain of the mental conflict was becoming more than she could bear. She took another turn through the shadows down the line of the familiar shelves.

Something within her had changed. As the books caught her eye, she remembered that idea of their modern absurdity which had seized her on the earlier turn; but since she had taken it, a long time seemed to have passed. An immense deal seemed to have happened. Life had changed for her in some profound and intimate way. She had an obscure sense of finality. Beneath the intensity of her feeling she was conscious, not of an inward numbness, but of a space made somehow empty. It was as if some purpose for which she had lived had slipped from her grasp, some phase of her life been closed ; as she passed through the shadows, she had almost that sense of something left suddenly behind which she had experienced in the garden of Hildon Place. The room had a different look. The books on the shelves, the portraits of famous people, the antique hearth, the heavy curtains before the window, she saw them with a sense of strangeness. The bond between these things and herself seemed somehow to have given way.

She paused by the big table on which stood the shaded lamp, and looked down at John.

" John," she said, " tell me : how will it be after this ? "

" After to-night ? "

" After all we have said to one another."

" I have a new hope," he said.

" Shall I say what I really feel ? "

" Yes, tell me," he said.

" I feel as if I were going to leave you."

He started. " You don't mean— "

" No, not literally. But I feel that something has come to an end between us. You will never look to me again as you looked an hour ago."

" I don't understand," he said.

" No, I don't either. But that's what I feel. It is as if there were something that we have killed between us."

" Nothing worth keeping alive, I think. Our lives have been too insincere."

" I don't know, John. I believe that what you mean by being insincere is what I mean by behaving decently. If you can't tell the truth without saying hateful things, it's better to leave it alone."

" Isn't that putting manners before the claims of truth ? "

" But I would !—fifty times over ! Truth has no claims at all if you can't tell it without being cruel. One thinks these things, one wants to say them—and it's all ever so much worse if one does ! We have done no good whatever. We have only made everything much more difficult."

" But the difficulties we had already ? "

" Oh, of course ! But at least one knew what they were. In a sort of way they even gave one something to live for."

" I don't follow, I am afraid."

" No, it does sound rather obscure. But you have been awfully good to me, and it wasn't fair your life should be spoilt."

" And you have lived to prevent it ? "

" Oh, John, you can't put things like these into words. You get them all wrong if you do. I have done nothing wonderful. And certainly there's nothing that I have been doing all the time. All I mean is that to prevent things from going from bad to worse has been a kind of object."

" You have done your best," he said.

" But I have made a hopeless mess of it. And now there's nothing more I can do. We have only made things worse—and somehow we have made them *different*. You look different to me already."

" I don't understand," he said. " And," he added, " I would to heaven I did ! "

" Yes, John, you do understand. If you didn't, you would never have made these discoveries about me. The tragic

part of it is that the more we understand one another, the further apart we seem. If we go on long enough, we shall end by feeling like strangers."

"I can't believe that," he said.

"I don't look different to *you*?"

"You will never look different to me."

"That's good of you, John. But shall we ever forget the things we have said?"

She was not prepared for his quiet answer. "I hope we shall remember them always."

"Remember this miserable talk?"

"No—remember our common courage."

"I don't feel very brave," she said.

"I think we have both been brave."

"In facing the facts as we have?"

"I should say," he answered, "that an hour like this is worth a millennium of what most people mean by happiness."

"But you can't live on a memory, John."

"No. But in courage you have a tremendous asset."

"There's the keeping it up."

"That's just where you're so strong."

"I!"

"Haven't you kept it up all these years? And now you will have something much better worth keeping up than a mere regard for my feelings."

"Do feelings count for so little?"

"I think we are not worth very much," he said, "if there are not things that count for a vast deal more."

"Being honest and telling the truth?"

"Yes—and accepting the consequences of what we have done."

"Ah, but that's not so easy!"

"It is what you are doing yourself."

"Am I?"

"Didn't you say just now that you had no thought of leaving me?"

"No."

" But you are perfectly free. There is nothing at all to prevent you. Goodness knows I would not try ! You are not dependent on me—you have an income of your own. Socially, the inconvenience would be quite inconsiderable. You would have the sympathy of all your friends."

She laughed a little. " You make the idea quite attractive," she said. " But I am too conventional to do anything half so spirited."

His voice rang out with its old exuberant note. " Nothing could be more untrue ! To run away is the conventional thing, the spirited thing is to stay. You are living up to your own tradition. Running away is the one thing you never forgive—people like you and Bertie and George. You would rather die, any of you, than fail to see a thing through."

" John," she said, " this is not very generous of you."

" Generous ? "

" To heap all these coals of fire on my head."

He smiled. " It is a method I can't forgo. I am fighting for you."

There was a smile on her lips too, but she felt very near to tears. " That's it, isn't it, John ? You love having something to fight for."

He looked at her, and in spite of the dimness of the shadows she could see that his look had fineness. " I, too, have my tradition," he said.

She turned away.

The room had a deeper oppressiveness. The shadows and the firelight and the shaded lamp and the warmth of the heavy air—the air of a room that had been heated and closed all night—had become intolerable to her. And suddenly she remembered the hour. It was not night, after all, but morning ; outside, it was probably light.

She went to the window, and drew the curtains aside. She unfastened the shutters, and folded them back in their place. She would have opened the window itself, had not the thought of her thin evening dress deterred her.

She stood at the window looking out.

The relief of the daylight was immense. The light was so pallid and dim, the sky of a leadenness so little relieved, the distance so misty and blurred, that she could not tell whether the sun had risen or not; there seemed to be nothing to show how night had changed to day. But the world of real life had come back, and the scene in the room behind her was over and done with and dead. The nightmare of the shadows and the shaded lamp had become no more than a memory. She felt more real herself. Near things looked so extraordinarily vivid that she could have fancied she had actually stepped outside. Their little walled garden with the cool wet grass of the lawn and the wintry poles of the pergola—she loved it for just being there! Far below, wonderful with tones of mist and smoke, lay the vastness of the awakening city. A dimness was over it all, but from the chimneys of roofs quite near rose little dark drifts of smoke. Suddenly she seemed to remember. How often had she looked at these winter dawns from the window of her room upstairs! She did not know what it meant, but a deep change of feeling seized her.

She turned back from the window.

The light was uncertain still, dim with a pale reluctance, and the bust of Savonarola gleamed with a whiteness that told of lingering shadows; but the scene of their talk was dead. The room had its familiar daytime look of a quiet and learned dignity.

John had risen at last, and was standing beside the big table. He had put out the shaded lamp. He was arranging the cups on the tray, but looked up as she came towards him.

The light was so full on his face that for an instant she glanced away. The exposure was too unmerciful. His face, his figure, the attitude in which he stood, told not of an utter tiredness only, but of the dejection of an immense discouragement. She saw in the look he gave her a dreadful confession of defeat, an acknowledgment that she had prevailed. And this was just what she could not bear. All

the tenderness in her, all the pity, all the deepest things in her nature, rose up in his defence. She was conscious of nothing but a blind intense desire to do some simple thing that would make this intolerable moment end.

She went quite close to him, and looked up in his face. "Kiss me," she said.

He did not move. Indeed his face became more rigid. "You do not believe that I love you."

"Never mind!"

His eyes were looking down into hers, and never had they seemed so strange. "That," he said, "is not how I wish to fight for you."

She gave the queerest of queer little laughs. "You needn't . . . if only you knew!"

She turned away—then turned back again.

"Do you know, John, that in all you have been saying to-night you have never once—" she hesitated.

"Tell me," he pleaded.

"—used one single term of endearment. I do not think you have even said my name."

His head sank. Once more she had only hurt him.

She went back to the window. She felt, as one does feel these things, that his eyes were still upon her. She was not much surprised when she heard his step on the carpet. He came to her, but did not speak. They stood together, in silence, side by side, their faces to the coming day.

PART VIII

I

Hepworth chose the first Sunday in July as the day for the dedication of the church.

The building of the exterior was finished. The planks and poles of the scaffolding, the cluster of shanties and sheds, the contractor's office, the engine with its protruding funnel, had all been cleared away ; what a few weeks before had been trodden ground, dusty and littered and furrowed, strewn with the refuse of chisel and saw, had become a seemly space gravelled and turfed, and enclosed with an appropriate railing on a well-pointed low brick wall. Within, however, there were still many things to do. Hepworth's taste was exacting, his energy quite inexhaustible. He had consulted a number of experts, but all he had gained from their conflicting opinions was a deepened confidence in the wisdom of his own. He had the pulpit restained. It had been carved from the design of a young artist member of the Movement, but had been left in a lighter tone than was quite harmonious with the building. The oak benches of the choir in the chancel had therefore to be darkened, too. Imperfections had been discovered by his vigilant eye in the tessellated pavement of the apse. This, in turn, had delayed the placing of the altar—not a table standing against an eastern wall as is the manner in a Christian church, but a symbol that attempted to express a more comprehensive conception of the rites with which man has worshipped. A white pillar of marble, simple, severe, moulded with austerity and restraint, rose from a marble base, and bore a capital on which a crown of thorns of gilded metal was supported by two gilt hands. Below, in gold letters the legend ran, " An Altar to the Ideal of the Good, the Beautiful, the True." In contrast to the brightness

of the nave and aisles into which the sun came freely, the apse had an effect of shadow, for the purity of its curve had not been broken by the unneeded concession of a window ; in the tempered light the solitary radiance of the marble—the altar stood alone in the centre of the tessellated floor—had an almost mystic impressiveness. It was the distinctive feature of the church. It revealed where the point of departure lay—of dissociation from the observances and beliefs of any of those older places of worship with which the church might otherwise have seemed at one. It proclaimed a dedication to a threefold quest, a recognition of a threefold claim : but it also proclaimed that the great ends of man have an inward unity, and that to attain complete fulfilment of these ends men must consecrate their gifts, their purposes, their lives, in a singleness of ideal devotion. It did not dominate—its art was too harmonious ; but seen in the perspective of the nave, beyond the last of the columns, beyond the arch of the chancel, beyond the oak benches of the choir, it offered itself as the thing most expressive of the faith of the worshippers and of the spirit of the service they held. The crown of thorns was Hepworth's own inspiration. He found many meanings in it. It lessened the break with Christian symbolism, and deepened the humanity of his own. It was a token of gratitude and remembrance—a heroes' trophy, a martyrs' wreath, a memorial to all great human pain which it would have been a baseness to forget. It had a purpose of warning and rebuke. Hepworth desired to keep his idealism free from the incentive of all false glamour. Sacrifice was still the law, and a soft and sentimental generation needed to be told that victories cost blood and tears. It was a symbol of pain, a symbol of sacrifice, a symbol of triumph and reward ; and it was also a symbol of pity. Hepworth was too democratic, and much too humane, to forget the inglorious multitude. Beyond the shining heroes and the martyred saints lay an inglorious multitude—the multitude of the suffering sinners who remained uncrowned, however deep the thorns might pierce.

But Hepworth, with his fine gift for getting work done, had gradually brought the end within sight. There were things that would have to be left, there were people who declined to be hurried (the organ builders among them) ; but at least he could contemplate the ceremony he had devised for the dedication with an anxiety free from panic. And Sunday was a day of rest. The services in the hall had been discontinued, as some of the fittings had been removed to the church. So when Susan suggested that the last week-end should be spent at Hildon Place, he found the suggestion good. They were to motor down after lunch on Saturday.

He gave the hours of Saturday morning to the church.

Beale was there to help him. It was help that no one else could give ; the help of an immense efficiency, and the help of an immense devotion. Beale had judgment, and Beale had ideas ; he knew, he understood, he cared ; like the Master he followed, he lived for the one great purpose. But it was perhaps his understanding of Hepworth himself that made his help what it was. Beale knew when to give him his head —there being nothing else to be done ; and he knew when he could head him off. To ask Hepworth to suffer fools gladly would have been an unreasonable demand ; but Beale did remind him sometimes that even fools have toes. Above all, Beale possessed a sense of humour. He laughed at the things which made other people angry ; he knew the unimportance of the foibles, of the difficulties of temperament and of mood, that had led to so many estrangements. He discovered what wonderful things humour can do when the hand of affection applies it. Without his failings the Master would have been less human, and would therefore have been less lovable.

But Beale was troubled. When the trouble began he did not know, for troubles of this kind have obscure beginnings, and one dismisses the first intimations. But somehow he associated his full recognition of a difference in Hepworth with the time of young Burrows's death. The connection was quite fortuitous, for he had been conscious that all was not

well with the Master for many months before. But it was at Christmas, or a little earlier perhaps, that he found he could no longer attribute the difference to the accident of a passing mood.

Other people had noticed a difference, too. The Master had become much easier to work with. His orders were less peremptory : his patience, when they failed to carry them out, was sometimes quite pathetic. And they attributed the improvement—it added very much to their comfort—to the good temper which goes with good spirits. The Master was nearing his goal. He had the gladness of a man who was about to enter his kingdom. Others, with a lighter metaphor and a more human touch, spoke of a child and its new toy. Beale knew better. He knew too well what the Master's good spirits were really like to be taken in by his present state. There were moments when the pace slowed down even in these crowded hours, and if Beale had been obliged to adopt a metaphor himself, he would have said that Hepworth was like a man who, instead of blowing a trumpet as just then he legitimately might, was listening in some unhappy way to a still small troubling voice. It was not that the Master was depressed. It was not that he showed any change of values. He said nothing that he might not have said at any time since Beale had known him. But there were certain things which he said more often than others, and said with a new insistence. Hepworth's common-sense had never expected an easy triumph, but it seemed to Beale that nowadays he was putting the acceptance of his message into a future still more remote. He was troubled. He did not know what the cause of the difference was, but he frankly regretted the difference. He regretted the genial exuberances of the broad old days of good-fellowship. Consideration and patience and an increase of self-control were good things, too, in their way ; but Beale had a troubled misgiving that the experience, which matures the temper, may also lower the vitality.

The hours of the morning passed. The sunlight of a warm

June day came through the unstained windows. The south aisle was full of gaiety and brightness, and even the marble of the altar, though the light of the apse had a tempered tone, gleamed with more than its usual radiance. The place, of course, was untidy. A carpenter was doing some last little jobs, and when the noise of his hammer ceased, it was followed by the noise of his saw. Two electricians were fixing large brass brackets above the capitals of the columns in the nave. The voice of the man on the ladder, when he called down to his mate who was standing by the bag of tools, sounded profane—and just the least little bit ghostly. Odd lengths of wire lay about on the chairs. A lady of the Committee was mending the cover of the lectern which one of the workmen had torn. The artist, who had designed the pulpit, had looked in to discuss with Hepworth the placing of a cinerary urn. The urn, which contained the ashes of a once prominent member of the Society, had been removed from the hall. But Saturday was a short half-day, and soon after half-past twelve the last of these persons had left them. Hepworth and Beale were alone.

Hepworth was sitting in the south aisle on a chair just two or three chairs from the wall. The sun of midday fell through the windows steeply, and did not reach much beyond the sills. It just missed Hepworth's figure. Beale had gone to the vestry. The service books were being temporarily stored in a cupboard, which Beale thought it better to lock. When he came back, he found Hepworth sitting quite idle—sitting just as he had left him. Idleness in Hepworth was unusual.

"You are tired?" Beale asked.

Hepworth shook his head. "No. I was only thinking."

"You are doubtful about the urn?" The urn was to be placed on the wall a little behind Hepworth's head.

"No. I was not thinking about the urn."

Beale waited.

"I was thinking," Hepworth said, "how wise we have been in not attempting an architecture of our own."

" I expect it would have been a bit fantastic," Beale said.

" I expect it would. But it is more than a question of beauty. A new style would have been misleading. It would have obscured our essential purpose."

" To preserve as much of the old as we can ? "

" It's more than that. We must not only have a church, but we must have a church as like those of the other Churches as possible, because we want to help these others to see what they can do with theirs. There is nothing they could not do !—with their tradition of devotion and worship."

Beale moved a step or two from the end of Hepworth's row. He turned and came back again. " All the same, I am sorry," he said, " for some of our unwary visitors. Our new wine may be something of a shock to them if they have overlooked the label on the bottle."

Hepworth smiled. " A pleasant shock, Beale—if they are intelligent persons."

Beale picked up a couple of large nails that a workman had left on the ground. " It's a pity the Christian Churches won't have us," he said. " It would make things much simpler."

" Yes, a pity for us both. A Church should be national."

" We come in for a lot of misunderstanding, you know."

" I don't regret it, Beale. It shows how much we stand for. But our services make our meaning plain. Any one who attends only one of our services will be enlightened as to their spirit. He will see that men need no supernatural incentive to worship. He will see that we, too, still seek ' to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever.' "

Hepworth rose from his chair. He looked at his watch.

" I wonder," he said, " whether that bit of zinc roofing has been put right at the base of the spire."

" Let's go and see," Beale suggested.

" Yes, there is time. We don't lunch till half-past one."

They mounted the stairs of the tower. They came out in the small space between the base of the spire and the

parapet. The defect in the roof had been remedied. Hepworth turned to the parapet and laid his hand on the sun-warmed stone.

It was one of those days that Susan loved. The Surrey hills were lost in a rich blue summer haze, and there was nothing but London to be seen. On the high elevation of his tower Hepworth looked down at a world all city, all human, all civilised, all colossally possessed by man ; but a world as romantic as ever, a plaything of time and chance. . . .

He stood on his tower, strong and erect, silent and still, the June sun on his masterful figure, his hand resting on the stone of the parapet as it might have rested on the wooden ledge of his pulpit. Beale felt that he looked the part—looked like a prophet meditating some large utterance on the destiny of a sinful and indifferent world. Nevertheless, Beale wondered. Hepworth might look prophetic—he often did ; but he was not given to picturesque poses. And as a general rule he was not much interested in the view. His vision was not of a kind to be inspired by a view. Beale was not happy about him.

Thinking it would be wise to leave him for a little, Beale passed round the small zinc-covered space to the other side of the spire. Here all the view he had was of a region of opulent houses set in gardens June-like and gay with an abundance of rambling roses. When he came back to Hepworth, he found that he had not moved. Beale chose another opening in the battlemented parapet, and looked down at the dreaming city.

" Yes," Hepworth said at last, " we were right. Misunderstandings there needs must be, but whatever mistakes may be made about us, there is one that we ought to escape. We ought not to be taken as trying to found a *new* religion."

" No," Beale agreed, " we ought to escape that absurdity. But we may be accused of presumption. Think of all the hundreds of chapels and churches there are down there already ! "

"No, Beale, we are not presumptuous. We know the future lies with them."

"*Does* it?"

"One of these days they will supersede us."

"Supersede?"

"We are working as pioneers. Pioneers may be useful persons, but it is to the people who come after the pioneers that we must look for the permanent building."

"Anyhow," Beale said, "it's the pioneers who have the pluck."

Hepworth waited a little. He laid his other hand on the stone.

"This is not work to be done single-handed."

"Doesn't the prophet usually work single-handed?"

"Perhaps. But the age of the prophets is passing. In the days to come religion will owe less and less to the vision of the isolated seer, and more and more to the collective inspirations of the community."

Here Beale broke out. "I don't believe it," he said. "The community would be nowhere without its prophets. Whatever inspirations it has, it jolly well owes to its prophets! And it jolly well always will!"

Hepworth laughed. "You're a hero-worshipper, Beale."

Beale did not let go. "Why not? The prophets are heroes at their best."

"Both belong to days when we took human nature more simply."

"When there were no psychologists about?"

Hepworth's humour was equal to it. "Certainly, when there were no pyschological novelists."

"It's a nursery game," Beale said. "Any child can pull things to pieces—if it's naughty enough."

"All the same," Hepworth said, "I think the psychologists are right. In the religions of the past great personalities have played too dominant a part. If we come to worship our heroes less, we may have more worship to give to the ideals for which they stand."

Beale was not very sure of this. " I suspect," he said, " the two worships hang together."

They were silent for several minutes.

Hepworth leaned on the stone of the parapet, and even this change of attitude, trivial and insignificant as it seemed, was not without meaning for Beale's observant eye. Hepworth was not given to leaning. His attitude contributed to Beale's general impression that there had been something not quite natural, not quite " like him," in all the things he had said. He had not said anything that Beale had not heard him say before, but he had spoken—so Beale fancied —with a different tone and intention. Beale understood and allowed for the Master's essential disinterestedness. Beale knew he could contemplate the entering of other men into the reward of his labours with the detachment of a supreme devotion. But was this a moment for being disinterested and detached? Was it not a moment for a legitimate personal pride? In former days he had been known to let himself go on occasions much smaller than this. Beale knew all the toil and the thought, all the fears and anxieties and high expectations, that had gone to the building of their tower. And now here they stood with their feet, so to speak, on the accomplished fact, with their dream come true in stone. At a moment like this was there need to hold oneself in?

The very morning was a call to gladness. Summer and sun and blue sky, the exhilaration of light and distance and air, quickened the impulses of youth and strength in his veins. His imagination responded to the inhabited scene. The city had the appeal of an interest that he missed in the landscapes of nature. All the things he saw were human, all the sounds were of human life. The turmoil of the traffic in the streets below came in a blended murmur, of which he was made the more aware by the sharp little points that broke it—the whistles of engines invisible on distant lines. There was more of what life meant to him in sounds like these than in any music of wind or waves. The city called

to him : it spoke of an immense opportunity. The church filled him with an overwhelming pride. He delighted in its material conspicuousness, but he saw it as a great deal more than a landmark in the landscape of London. He saw it, with the eye of his pride and the eye of his faith, as a landmark in the history of religious ideas.

Hepworth did not move. He leaned on the parapet, his arms on the sun-warmed stone, his hands clasped, his head, a little tense and rigid, slightly raised, as if he were looking, not at the city below, but at some distant point where the summer mist drifted up into the summer sky. It was an attitude he sometimes assumed in the pulpit when he sought a more intimate understanding with his hearers. Beale felt his silence the more, because he seemed on the edge of speech. But he did not speak, and Beale's impression changed. The idea came to him that though Hepworth's voice was silent, his spirit was holding converse : something in the poise of his head, the clasp of his hands with the thumbs pressed close together, in the slight parting of his lips, suggested, quite irresistibly, that he was addressing an invisible listener. The impression was so vivid that Beale actually looked away. One does not intrude on a man in a moment so private, an abandonment so unguarded and forgetful. Of whatever he was thinking, it was not of the church, it was not of the city, it was not of the future of their cause. It was of something intimately personal and his own. It was of the thing that had made this difference in him of which Beale was so deeply aware. And Beale was conscious of a sinking of the heart. He was conscious of a good deal more. There came to him a sudden fear. He was not anxious—he was quite definitely afraid. He was possessed by an apprehension vague, undefined, irrational, but peculiarly distressing and intense. He still saw the world about him—the chimneys and spires and green spaces, the sun and the sky, the depth of the noontide blue ; but he seemed to be seeing through and beyond these things, and discovering a reality that lurked behind. This reality was

disclosed to his penetrating vision as fraught with a dreadful menace. He saw the world as all menace. He shrank from his thoughts of a few minutes before; he convicted himself of trifling. The city was revealed in terms of forces vast, mysterious, menacing, the forces engendered by this prodigious accumulation of human passions, this immense assemblage of human wills, in the presence of which his ideas appeared of no more importance than a handful of pebbles that a child tosses into a mighty sea. It was the vision only of a moment. His nerves steadied. Reason regained her sway. He looked at Hepworth again. He was still leaning on the parapet, his hands clasped, his eyes on the distant haze. Beale continued to look. Reason had not quite regained her sway. The luridness of his vision faded, but the sense of apprehension remained. It was as if some primitive instinct, some long-buried proneness to superstition and fear, had reminded him of its deep persistence. The fear defined itself, as he looked at Hepworth so strangely silent, so strangely still, as a presentiment, a warning, a premonition. Beale himself grew still. The warm stone on which his hand rested suddenly turned very cold. He had another moment of strange illumination. It was as if, this time, he were looking into the depths of his own affection, and seeing, with a vision quickened by the fear of loss, what the friendship of this man meant to him. . . .

II

Kitty was not getting on well.

The track was too narrow for her rather unsteady little feet, and the gorse that lined it pricked her bare little legs.

"I'se tired," she said.

Susan, who was leading the way, stopped in the track and turned round.

"No, darling, not yet! We have only just left the car."

"I'se tired," Kitty repeated.

Susan came to her. "Give me teddy," she said. "Then you'll get along better."

She relieved Kitty of the big fluffy burden of the bear.

John overtook them.

"I think I had better carry her," he said. "It's rather a long way, isn't it?"

"To the stones? No, it's not very far. You can't see them, because they are just over the brow of the hill. But perhaps you'd better give her a lift. Let me carry the basket."

"You will find it rather heavy."

"No, there's not much in it. You really can't carry both."

John yielded.

He handed the basket to Susan over Kitty's small head. He picked up the hat which Kitty had dropped in the heather, and seated Kitty herself on one arm. Susan moved on again, and John followed her lead.

They had motored down from Hampstead the day before, and had brought down Kitty with them. All three were staying at Hildon Place. This arrangement was Susan's work, and it had taken some courage to compass it.

Elsie was having her troubles. Clouds had gathered in the rather uncertain sky of her marriage, and were casting some

depth of shadow. Her husband was not keeping it up. The generosity with which he had accepted Kitty and the episode of her birth had shown grave signs of flagging. He was not unkind to the child, but time had not helped him to forget that Bertie had not been Elsie's husband. Moreover, he had lost his job. The firm for which he worked had been obliged to reduce its staff, and the depression in his trade made it difficult to obtain another. To add to these troubles, Elsie was expecting her confinement. It was here that Susan saw her chance. To be relieved of Kitty for the next few days would be a great comfort to Elsie. It was a relief that Susan could give her. John would return to London on Monday, but she herself was to remain at Hildon till the middle or end of the week.

John's consent had been easy to obtain, but John was not the person most concerned. To approach Rose and George—and, of course, more especially Rose—was a very different matter indeed. To give herself as good a chance as she could, she had motored down about ten days before, and had spent the day at Hildon Place. She had begun with George.

She had imagined that she had foreseen most of the possible turns that her talk with George could take, but she had found, of course, that she hadn't !

George had listened with his restful absence of comment. He had done no more, that is, than fill one of the gaps in her plea. " Holmes is dead," he reminded her, " and no one down here has the slightest idea that any Kitty exists." This was a fact that had tended to strengthen her hand, but he had otherwise preserved so much of his old air of caution and a suspended judgment that Susan could not tell where in the end he meant to come out. For what he did actually say she was not in the least prepared.

" Sue," he had asked, " why don't you adopt the child ? "

Susan had laughed from sheer surprise. " The idea has never occurred to me."

" John wouldn't object."

" Possibly not. But that's just why I couldn't ask him. Besides, there's Elsie. She wouldn't see it in the least."

" It would make things easier with her husband."

Susan had shaken her head. " No. It's really not possible."

George had let it drop. It was George's way to let things drop.

But Susan had felt that she must go on. " You don't object yourself? "

" To Kitty's coming to us? Why should I? "

" It's awfully good of you."

" Not in the least. I rather want to see her."

Susan remembered something that John had told her once—how Bertie himself had wanted to go and *see*. . . .

" How about Rose? " she asked.

George's answer came at once. " She will be delighted, of course."

Susan was a little taken aback. " Hardly—*of course*, do you think? "

" It is her idea, you know."

" What is? "

" That you should adopt little Kitty."

" Rose's idea? "

George looked at her with something more than either caution or judgment in his eye. " You don't know how fond Rose is of you, Sue."

Susan understood. She knew how much of a sorrow it was to Rose that she, Susan, had no child.

" I think she was fond of Bertie," she said.

Thus had Kitty's visit to Hildon Place been arranged.

The track they followed threaded its ribbon-like little way through the flowerless heather and the stunted low-growing gorse which pricked Susan's ankles uncomfortably. The chauffeur, in whose charge they had left the car, had drawn it up by the side of the road, now tarred and no longer white. Susan had not been on the moor since that afternoon, three years ago, when she had turned up the leafy lane at

the Allinsons' gate, and paid the stones her solitary visit. Her memories of that day were vivid. Then, as now, the heather had given her the freedom of the grey sombre waste of its wildness, and the sky of an English June had been blue above her head. She remembered that she had been burdened with her racquet and shoes as now she was burdened with the basket. She remembered her meeting with George ; the drive on the box of the brougham that had held Mrs. Matthews inside ; the tea in the garden of the *Crow and Harrow* ; the meeting with Gladys and aunt Jane on the platform at Hinchley Row. Had it all happened yesterday, or had it happened some centuries ago ?

She heard the voice of John behind her.

" Are we on the right track ? " it asked. " The one we have crossed is much better defined."

They had just crossed a track so much more important that it actually bore the ruts of wheels.

" We are all right," Susan said. " That leads round to the quarry."

" It looks as if it might be an easier way."

" No. It doesn't go to the stones at all. Only to the foot of the quarry. Are you beginning to find Kitty rather a weight ? "

She stopped and turned round.

" No. I think we are doing very well."

Susan laughed. " I am quite sure Kitty is ! "

Kitty certainly " looked it." Perched on John's left arm, nestling comfortably against his shoulder, she had an air of having been there before—as in point of fact she had, in her games in the Hampstead garden. She was still without her hat, which John carried with his own in his disengaged right hand, and her head of very fair fluffy little locks was close to his own dark hair. She had one arm round his neck. Susan stepped back to them, and pulled down Kitty's little frock, which Susan herself had given her, and pulled up her little white socks. Susan noticed where the gorse had pricked her.

" Naughty gorse," she said, " How it *has* pricked our poor little legs ! "

Kitty, safe and superior, could afford to forget past troubles.

" It can't get at me now," she said.

" That's a good thing, isn't it ? Give me a kiss." John lowered his burden to a height convenient for kissing.

" Now let's get on," he said. " It is hot standing here."

Susan moved on again.

" There will be a nice air on the top," she said.

She still led the way. As they mounted the hill, the climb grew steeper, and the track more overgrown. The going was not very good, for in the track there were stones which the heather concealed and against which one tripped uncomfortably, and there were broken little bits, like steps that had crumbled away, which it took a long stride to mount. At a point where the track seemed to make an irrelevant curve, John, impatient of all digressions, proposed a bee-line through the heather. But Susan knew better than that. The thinnest of tracks—when it comes to heather—is better than no track at all.

Besides, she was enjoying it. The rather absurd little pretence of adventure was just the thing she loved. She would have been sorry if only one of the broken-step-like little bits had been levelled and smoothed away. The farther they left the tarred road behind them, the deeper her sense of freedom became. This was how she had felt that afternoon three years ago. Her memories were extraordinarily vivid. She fancied she could remember the very point—it must have been near the track that led to the foot of the quarry—where the weight had lifted, her mind had cleared, and she had realised how glad she was to be there. The extreme vividness of her recovered impressions amused and almost startled her. It was not merely the incidents of that afternoon that came back—the things she had done, her hour at the stones, her meetings with George and aunt Jane ; it was something stranger and much more intimate. It was the

very *feel* of herself that came back. It was as if indeed she were not remembering at all; the past and the present had blended.

This feeling did not last many moments ; the past and the present fell apart again ; the life of the last three years intervened. And how much of this life there had been ! It might all have happened yesterday, but also—it might have happened many centuries ago ! The strangest part of it all, now that she came to think of it, was that the life of these years had made so little real difference. The self of that afternoon and the self of to-day were in all essentials the same. Only, it seemed to her now that she understood very much better.

From behind she heard John's voice again.

" Is it much farther ? " it asked.

She was surprised that his voice sounded so faint. She had not known she was so much ahead.

" No, not much farther. The stones are just over the brow of the hill."

" I am going to rest for a minute or two," he said.

" I will wait at the top," she called back to him.

She felt an absurd little pleasure. This was just the very thing she wanted. The sun was hot, and she was becoming unpleasantly warm. There was no breeze on this side of the hill. But she would not have stopped for worlds, nor even have turned round and looked back. She actually quickened her pace. She wanted to increase the interval. She must have these next few minutes to herself, the last few yards that remained. She smiled at her own absurdity. What that afternoon she had done only in thought she was doing now quite literally. She was running away. It was all very childish indeed. But she did want to go on with her memories, to be able to imagine, as long as she could, that she was up here alone. She wanted to have the first look at the stones by herself.

When, however, she reached the top, she waited. The stones now were only a few feet away, and she had a good look at them. They were quite as unimpressive as ever. The

four dwarfed time-worn remnants of what might once have been a sacred circle did seem poor forlorn old things. This was why she had been so fond of them. If they had been known and visited, sights starred in a guidebook, things people came to see, they would have had quite a different look. They would have lost that shade of irony which she found in the fact of their survival. She turned round, and glanced down the hill for John and Kitty.

They were at the beginning of the last little pitch. Kitty was still perched on John's arm, and his steps being rather unsteady owing to the broken bits he had to climb, her head did a good deal of bobbing. Seen at this distance, with the sunlight full upon it, her fair hair, in contrast to his dark locks, looked almost white. It occurred to Susan that with this hot sun upon her Kitty ought not to be without her hat. She could hear John's voice, though she could not hear what he said. From the evenness of his tones and Kitty's silence, she guessed he was telling a story. How like John that was ! A story !—with that sun and that hill to contend with ! " He is a perfect saint ! " she thought. " For it is not in the least that he really cares for her ! "

John finished his climb at last. His breathing was a little laboured, his face very moist indeed. He put Kitty down in front of Susan, stretched the arm on which Kitty had rested, and wiped the moisture from his forehead. He put on his straw hat, and looked down over the scene of his toil. At his feet the long slope up which he had climbed was covered with the expanse of the heather, across whose deceptively smooth-looking surface their track lay like a tiny cleft. In the distance, spread over the hollow below and the side of the opposite ridge, was a varied and cultivated landscape—a prospect of woods and farms and patterned fields and the parks of gentlemen's places.

" It is a wonderful view," he said.

Susan, who had taken Kitty's hat from his hand, put it on Kitty's reluctant little head.

" You are not disappointed ? " she asked.

" It's wonderful," he repeated.

He turned round and looked over the top of the hill.

" But where are the stones ? " he asked.

Susan laughed. " Oh, the poor old things ! "

" What do you mean ? "

" Why, there they are in front of you ! "

He saw them. Susan watched his contemplation with amusement. The poor old things had always to be pointed out in this way. Their greenish, lichen-covered forms had been so worn by centuries of skies and storms that people always took them for diminutive rocks. Only the tallest of them, and that was barely four feet high, was in the least conspicuous.

" I thought there were four," he said.

" There are. The fourth is on the other side." She crossed the stretch of close-cropped turf, that was like an oasis in the desert of heather, to the other side of what archæologists, in their bold imaginative way, claimed as a sacred circle. " It's here," she said. " This tuft of grass has hidden it."

" I see," John said.

Kitty had trotted across to Susan's side. She peered down through the high grass which was almost as tall as she.

" What's you looking at ? " she asked.

" This old stone," Susan said.

Kitty looked up in her face.

" Mammy's got one like that."

Susan was a little surprised. " Has she? One as big as this? "

Kitty reflected. " It's littler," she conceded.

" And what does Mammy do with it ? "

" It's on the chimbley-piece."

Susan laughed. She remembered that a block of—she knew not what !—stood between the two rather portentous vases on the chimney-piece of Elsie's best room. It was inscribed with the name of the seaside place from which it had come as " A Present."

" I remember," Susan said. " It stands in front of the looking-glass."

But Kitty's interest was exhausted. The tormentilla in the turf had caught her eye, and she began to gather the small yellow flowers. John crossed the circle to Susan who was still standing by the stone. She apologised.

" I warned you not to expect too much, you know."

John was gracious. " I wish I were more of an archæologist," he said. " I'm sure these stones are really very interesting things, but my imagination is not equal to what they leave to it."

Susan laughed. " Perhaps it's better that it isn't ! Have you noticed the picture in George's den ? "

" The stones have been painted ? "

" Yes ; Iris Winchley painted them when she stayed with us years ago. It's rather a lurid picture."

" She has imagined a scene of the ancient rites ? "

" She has ! It's something like this. The foreground is all dark and mysterious. But you can make out a crowd of people. You can see the backs of some of their heads. They are gazing up at the priest, who stands above them by the side of a long flat stone. You can't see what is on the stone, but you're horribly sure it's the sacrifice. The sun is just beginning to rise. It shines on the face and shoulders of the priest, and—this is the dreadful part of it—on the knife he holds in his hand. He seems to be making a kind of inspired sacrificial gesture. You know he is just going to strike. And the way the blade of that knife glitters in the light—most of the picture being more or less dim—is . . . well, perfectly horrible ! Iris really is rather clever."

" My imagination was certainly not equal to that," John said.

" Was the sacrifice *human*, do you think ? "

" Let's hope for the best," John said.

He was looking over the small stretch of moor which lay beyond the stones. " What is that railing for ? " he asked. He pointed to a row of some half dozen wooden posts, with rough-looking bars between them, that rose above the heather at some little distance from where they stood.

"To protect the top of the quarry," Susan told him. "That's a very dangerous bit."

"Quarry? You would not suppose there was anything like that over there."

"No, would you? Come and have a look," Susan suggested.

She captured Kitty, who was still busy with the small bright flowers, and took her carefully by the hand. The track from the stones was broad enough to enable them for the first time since they had left the road to walk together side by side. When they came to the quarry, her hold of Kitty tightened. John put his hand on the rough top bar.

"Mind," Susan said. "That rail is a rickety old thing—at least it used to be. And the ground is very crumbly on the other side."

"I will be careful," John said.

The quarry, which had not been used for many years, had sides of varying degrees of steepness; at one or two points the clean-cut surface of the stone made a precipitous drop, but for the most part the sheerness of the fall was broken by the ledges that marked the elevations at which the men had once worked, or, where the stone had crumbled, by screes of loose earth down which, though difficult, it might not have been impossible to climb. Tufts of coarse grass, patches of heather, and clumps of broom now darkened with discoloured-looking pods, had taken advantage of the long disuse; they grew on the ledges, and beside the diminutive courses worn by the rain in the accumulations of softer earth. The quarry was roughly circular. With the sunlight on no more than the upper half of one side, it had a well-like effect of gloom. The floor was a tangle of wildness. Low-growing blackberry bushes had possessed themselves of one corner, and, on mounds of refuse left by the quarrymen, foxgloves, their purple deepened by the shadow, stood out like feathers in the crest of a bird. There were places, however, where the ground remained stony and bare, entirely without vegetation.

Below the railing, which was two or three feet from the

edge, there was a drop of perhaps some seventy feet. At first the drop was sheer, for the stone had been clean-cut ; but at no great distance from the top the fall was broken by what remained of one of the disused ledges—a crumbling shelf that stood out like a bracket on a wall. The further descent, though always steep, was seldom quite precipitous ; there had been irregularities in the quarrying, and screes of soil and small stones lay between the perpendicular bits.

A few feet on Susan's left a small groove-shaped channel, gravelly and bare, like the bed of a dried-up stream, passed under the lower bar of the railing ; the edge had crumbled badly, and a shoot of loose earth fell to the end of the bracket-like shelf. A clump of broom grew at the point where the loose earth reached the shelf.

" George climbed up once," Susan said. " In the days of his youth. I shall never forget it ! "

" It must have been an alarming sight."

" It was perfectly awful ! "

Susan felt a tug at her hand.

" I want to go," Kitty said.

Susan tightened her clasp. " Dearie, wherever do you want to go ? "

Kitty pointed to the channel. " I want to get those flowers."

A patch of lady's fingers grew just under the bar of the railing.

Susan was horrified. " Dearie, how dreadful ! You'd never gather any more if you did. You'd go over the edge—and you'd never come up again ! "

This was a fate too lamentable for Kitty's small mind to grasp, but on the whole her small mind was reasonable. She tugged no more at Susan's hand. But her contemplation of the flowers had the wistful persistence of an intention not wholly abandoned.

John was looking at the view. " That's a fine stretch of woodland over there," he said, " on the other side of the valley."

" It belongs to George," Susan told him.

" Ah ! His property extends as far as that ? "

" It's rather scattered," Susan explained. " I think that's about the end of it."

John's tone was sympathetic. " It's a fine property " he said.

Susan smiled. For all the grim things she had heard him say about the land and the people who owned it, the thought of being connected with the possessor of those woods and farms gave him a touch of pleasant satisfaction. It did not amount to very much, this satisfaction of his, for his mind was far from worldly, but the satisfaction in fact was there. And she liked him the better for it. An inconsistency so human and genial was rather an engaging trait. Only. . . . The smile faded from her lips. Had not this inconsistency had something to do with one of his reasons for marrying her ?

She turned abruptly from the view.

" Let's have tea," she said.

They strolled back to the stones.

III

They had finished their tea. Kitty—she had eaten a good one—had fallen asleep with her head on Susan's knee. John was reading the *Observer*.

Susan felt she need not have hurried. The place was quite as much hers as if she had been there alone. The effect of John's presence was to make the scene belong to her all the more. He went on with his paper, and their silence deepened her sense of detachment. Speech did not bring them together, but it was in their silences that she most deeply measured the gulf.

She looked down over the heather at the wide stretch of country beyond.

The scene itself did not change. The blue of the summer sky was decorated with scrolls of shifting cloud, which cast over distinct little patches of the landscape the gloom of a transient shadow. The tower of the church in the distance grew dark and disappeared ; the front of a farmhouse ceased to glow, and faded among enfolding trees. Or the shadow rolled off a furrowed field, which came out white with vividness. Still the scene itself did not change. She was looking, she felt, at old immemorial things. But it was not from even the oldest of them that her sense of a changelessness came. The church was older than the farms, and the stones were older than the church ; the fields over which the shadows passed had once been covered with forest. In some far-off day even the brightness of her moor might have been buried in trees. Transformations of this kind took you a long way back, but in all such changes there was something unimportant, accidental, not of the essence of things, something that left a silence unbroken, a permanence still undisturbed. It was no mere permanence of visible features,

however long these might last ; it was not that the hills had outlived the forest, and that no one knew when the sky began : it was rather that the scene had a secret as well as a story, a silence that made history seem superficial. You could not look into a distance like this without feeling that the world has an edge—an edge over which you could not look. The last of the mysteries lay there. . . .

John was lying on his side, his right elbow resting on the turf, his back towards her. The paper was hidden by the breadth of his massive shoulders ; she could see no more of it than just one corner with the number of the page at the top. In the space between herself and his solid back was the brown wicker basket in which their tea had been packed. Their Thermos flasks had been propped against it, while the white enamelled cups, turned upside down, stood on the grass in a row. John's straw hat lay on the lid of the basket. Susan let her hand play very gently with the fair locks of Kitty's little head. It was proving a pleasant picnic—a pleasant way of spending a Sunday afternoon. Susan smiled. She thought of the ancient stones. What would the priests of those prehistoric, and no doubt rather blood-thirsty, rites, have made of the latest of their successors—with his newspaper, his Thermos flasks, his car at the foot of the hill ? A good deal had happened since the days of those very dreadful observances, but she suspected, all the same, that if one went deep enough, one would find between John and his grim forerunners one or two small points in common. At this moment, however, the suggestions of his holiday figure were completely genial and modern. She felt sympathetically towards his newspaper. To see him taking his Nature with a tempering of news gave the picture a nice homely touch.

Then the smile on her lips died out.

Why did she feel in this way about him ? All the afternoon he had been entirely genial. He had been observant, interested, sympathetic : he had done all he could to please her. He had been quite perfect with Kitty. And his behaviour

this afternoon had been in no way exceptional. All through the months that had passed since their talk in the December dawn he had been incredibly good to her. He had exercised a wonderful self-control. Impatience and irritability are not failings of which a man can cure himself in a day, but the brusqueness had gone from his manner, and those unpleasant moods, which she had disliked so acutely, had now disappeared altogether. She called him sometimes a saint, but more often she called him something that appealed to her very much more : a man with a fine point of honour. He showed a delicacy in all his relations with her—especially in the most delicate. What more could a woman want ? How many women ever got half so much ? And yet. . . .

Reason could do nothing for her. She told herself just what she was—unreasonable, ungrateful, stupid—oh, yes, very stupid indeed ! She was perverse, and horrid, and hard. She very much disliked hard women, but could a woman, who had not some hardness in her, persist in a feeling like hers ? A time should come when one put such feelings away from mere considerations of decency. To keep it up against a man who was doing his best to be good to you was an altogether unnatural thing. But reason gave her no help. Her feeling went so deep as to be almost a matter of instinct. It had a kind of malignant permanence. It lay beyond the reach of all softening influences, those of her best moments, those of her kindest moods, as the landscape before her kept its secret through all the changes of nature and of man.

The scene in the winter's dawn had proved a quite useless misery. Her fears had all been fulfilled. Everything had been made more difficult. For one thing, it *had* been a " scene," and her dislike of scenes was almost morbidly acute. They offended her taste, they awakened her natural timidity. Until her marriage she had had no experience of them. She had had nothing worse to remember than some unpleasant five minutes when she had dismissed an impertinent cook. It had been of no gross or ignoble kind, their

scene in the winter's dawn ; indeed, it had been one of those momentous hours when the lowest depths are sounded, and the meaning of life may be changed. When either something precious is given to you, or something precious taken away. It was because it had made so tremendous an impression upon her that it had left everything so much more difficult. It had done them a dreadful disservice ; it had deepened the self-consciousness of both, and made each more conscious of the other. This had been one of her troubles from the first. She had been caught in the network of John's convictions, and of the innumerable susceptibilities to which his convictions gave rise. She could never be quite herself, never quite natural with him, because she knew that most of the things she thought and felt, cared for, enjoyed, believed, had his convictions against them, and you had to consider the convictions of a man who lived with the eye of the universe upon him. Now it was all much worse. His susceptibilities had a still stronger claim to be considered, and—it had become impossible to consider them ! He had found her out. Whatever she said or did, she knew that he saw through it. He always suspected her motive. And what a queer kind of suspicion it was ! Usually the motives which people suspected might be considered more or less bad : but what motive could be better than hers ? All she was trying to do was to piece a few of the bits together, make some sort of life for them possible. All she was trying to do was to cover the worst aspects up, keep the worst things out of sight, head them off from another of those terrible scenes. If this involved a little pretending, what on earth did it matter ? Would he have liked it better if she had been gloomy or tragic, or given herself the airs of a *femme incomprise* ? One is not necessarily a villain because one sometimes smiles. But whenever she smiled, she felt his eye was upon her—a questioning eye, an eye of reproach, the eye of a man who suffered, an eye that said as plainly as words could say, " No, I am not deceived. I know you mean nothing by it. You dislike me as much as ever."

Most of which was quite untrue ! She *did* mean to make him as much return as she could for all his unfailing goodness. Deception had nothing to do with it. " Sincerity " was a word she had come to detest. What in the world was meant by it ? Were you required to tell people all you thought of them every time you opened your lips ? She believed it was a matter of vanity : you might try to be as nice to people as you could, but if they suspected that you did not positively adore them, they called you insincere. It would all have been so much less difficult for her if he had had more to do with women. He gave her a curious feeling that there was something in women that was somehow contrary to his principles. It was necessary for his moral comfort to think of them somehow as men—or at all events as " human beings." And what she wanted was just to be given a margin ! That kind of margin most men are willing to give when they expect you to behave like a woman—when they know enough of your difficulties to respect your way of meeting them.

And he was not less conscious of her than she was conscious of him. He, too, was never quite natural, never quite his real self. He was trying to adapt his manner to some imaginary standard of hers, to live up to some conception of her as—as heaven only knew what ! He overdid the whole thing horribly—exaggerated the importance of many hopelessly trivial little things. At times he wrung her heart, at times caused her a vague irritation. It was all so perfectly useless ! What a man was, he was, and nothing in the world could change him. And she was not this sort of woman at all !—the sort that likes to mould men and tame them and influence them and keep them standing perpetually on a polite but tiresome hind leg. As if ease were not of the essence of the whole ridiculous business ! It was contrary to the fitness of things that his dignity should be impaired.

All the time, try as she would to get rid of it, try to reason herself out of it as she constantly did, there remained

at the back of her mind a lurking and malevolent doubt. She seemed to herself so unreasonable, so morbidly exacting, so perverse, that she wondered at times whether she were not the least little bit mad. People were mad, weren't they, if they held to an idea when the evidence was all against it? The evidence was clearly all against hers ! There could be no question at all that he suffered ; and he suffered because he was essentially kind, because he was essentially generous. He suffered because his nature was chivalrous and loyal. She realised that she had not been fair to him. She had always known he would suffer, but she had not foreseen that it would be so much on her account, for the sake of her disappointment, that the failure of their marriage would hurt him. He had risen to the tragic occasion with a rather magnificent magnanimity.

Kitty was still asleep. Susan adjusted the coat on which she was lying, and made the position of her head more secure. John's back was still towards her. It was so long since she had heard the paper crackle that she fancied he too was asleep. It amused her to think she was the only creature awake in a world overtaken by slumber. Nothing moved but the clouds. She wondered why they did—so little did she feel the breeze herself. It was a world all warmth and stillness and summer, all tranquil and mellow, rich with the deep maturity of an English landscape in June. The fact that it was a Sunday afternoon gave a literalness to the thought of rest. Yet the thought was a pure delusion ! Nature was never at rest, and man seldom and very imperfectly. This golden hour was no more than a fleeting moment in the succession of Nature's vicissitudes. This appeared to be Nature's way. She looked quietly on, and let you delude yourself about her. . . .

It occurred to Susan that as it was with Nature so it might be with people. They kept their secret, while you made your mistakes about them. She returned to the thought of John. Just where did her own mistake really lie ? What was it that she so persistently doubted ? Not his goodness, his

generosity, his kindness—of these she had hourly proof. She no more doubted his essential kindness than she doubted his essential rectitude. But there was more in their difficult relations than that, in the difficult and discordant situation in which the failure of their marriage had placed them. She tried to keep his goodness before her, but she knew that it did not settle the matter. The past would not let her go—the past with its accumulation of memories and impressions, inferences, conjectures, misgivings, with such understanding of him as she believed their intimacy had given her. Some idea of his motives, of the way his mind really worked, some ineffaceable impression of his personality, resisted all her attempts to change them. She wished to give full weight to the evidence of the last six months, but the idea and the impression remained fundamentally the same. What it all came to was this : in spite of everything that had happened since, all that he had been doing for her, all the splendid efforts he had made, she found herself feeling very much as she had felt in the hour of their tragic talk. Something within her was holding her back, something that remained unconvinced. The old questions kept asking themselves. What did it really mean to him ? How deep did his suffering go ? How long was it likely to last ? His gospel of courage and strength lent itself in an obvious way to the encouragement of quick recoveries. But horribly ungrateful as it was of her, she had a sense of things being overdone. She did not doubt his goodness, but she found it very hard to keep up with it. Surely some deduction must be made somewhere if there were anything of our average humanity in him ! His treatment was too conscious, too consistent, too much of a piece ; he seemed to be following a line he had deliberately adopted, acting on a definite idea. That was just what she knew he would do ; it was on an idea that he always acted. But she had a feeling that with great sufferings, great passions, great loves, men were seldom consistent and deliberate. They were desperate and reckless and wild. . . .

All the same, it was hard on John—horribly, tragically

hard on him. The original mistake had been hers. She ought not to have married him. And having married him, she ought to have done much better. She saw the things other women were doing in much harder cases than hers. She was simply making him pay—pay for a mistake that had scarcely been his at all. She had tried not to make him pay—but she had! There were moments when pity and self-reproach swept all the rest away, and she thought of him just as "Poor John!" She found she could, and she did, say very often "Poor John!"

If only these moments had lasted!

But the pendulum always swung back.

She could never forget his egoism.

In a sense she respected him for it. The greatest work, she believed, was usually done by great egoists. Leaders of movements, religious or otherwise, might be no worse than the others—than musicians or painters or poets; but were they very much better? They were none of them persons to marry. His conception of himself had received a dreadful blow, and his egoism would not let him rest till the injury had been repaired. To be satisfied with himself was a sheer necessity of his nature. He could not live without the approval of his pride. This was why that something within her always remained unconvinced. She saw in nearly all he did an attempt, conscious or unconscious, to recover his self-approbation. Certainly he was trying to atone to her for what he believed the failure of their marriage had meant to her ; but was he not also atoning to himself for what its failure had meant to him? The next best thing to succeeding was to show a certain magnificence in failure. It was the way he overdid little things, the exaggerated attention he paid to rather absurd little formalities, that made her most aware of his effort, and most distrustful of its meaning. An idea might make a man act in this way, but not a profound emotion. His egoism gave him no rest. It appeared to her sometimes that he could hardly be with her at all, hardly see her come into

the room or leave it, without being reminded of the part he had to play. She never questioned his sincerity—at least in the usual sense ; but she was always uncertain—she was always doubting and wondering. How far was he doing it for her, how far was he doing it for himself?

And, after all, what did it matter ?

There was one thing of which she was perfectly sure—that she was most utterly tired.

She was tired of the whole situation. She was tired of herself. She was tired of her doubts and misgivings, her self-justification and self-reproach, her antagonism, her ingratitude, of the falseness of a position for which she could see no relief. She was tired of the strain and the worry, of the tiresomeness as well as the tragedy. After all, what did it matter ? Even if it were his egoism that suffered most, what, after all, did it matter ? It was dreadful that he should suffer at all. To make any one suffer, man, woman, or child, was the one unpardonable offence. She believed herself so unlikely to commit this offence that the position at times had a look of positive absurdity ! Whatever one did or did not do, one did not make people suffer. That terrible scene came back. She had failed in that scene most lamentably, and yet—hadn't she given him his chance at the end ? Hadn't she given him many such chances in the years of their life together ? Hadn't she always been ready to give them ? If only he had been just different enough to make use of one of her chances ! If only he could have made her believe—or even let her pretend to believe—that her love was a thing he needed. . . .

IV

The hour was more golden still. The clouds no longer moved. Those she had watched for so long had melted away, or had drifted into different patterns. Shadows passed no more over the open spaces of the fields, though the hedgerows and woods that bordered them had deeper bands of shade. The sun shone undimmed on the smooth-looking surface of the heather, scored over its grey expanse with the scratches of tiny paths. The air was still free from the chilliness that will creep into English afternoons even in the high days of summer. The scene had a tranquillity that appeared to rebuke misgiving, so deep was its secret—if it had one !—buried in the brooding stillness. But Susan was on her guard.

Kitty and John were awake. Kitty, happy with her teddy bear, the pale yellow fluff of whose coat she was trying to decorate with the bright yellow flowers of the tormentilla, was safely at rest a few yards behind Susan's back. John was now sitting up. He had finished his Sunday paper, and was putting the enamelled cups in the wicker basket, where he had already placed the flasks. Susan liked seeing him do it. It was when she saw him doing little human trivial things that she felt most kindly towards him. And Susan was given to taking small opportunities herself. A suspicion of discomfort and self-consciousness sometimes went with the taking of them, but to show a constant awareness of their deeper relations would have been more uncomfortable still, and would have been a little idiotic. It came naturally to her to consider other people's comfort, and even at the risk of John's questioning eye she went on considering his.

" You will have to make an early start to-morrow morning," she said.

" Yes. Beale is to meet me at the church at ten."

" Sarah must see that you have an early breakfast." She thought of saying, " I will have breakfast with you," but felt that this might be going too far. " You will have a hard week," she added.

" Our members have given us all the help they can. Have I told you of Mrs. Tyrrell's cheque ? "

" No."

" She wishes to provide all the flowers we shall need on Sunday."

" And we shall need a good many ! "

" We shall. We shall have to use them to cover up our deficiencies."

" Oh, you won't want them for that ! " she laughed. A thought occurred to her. " What has become of Anne ? "

" Anne ? "

Susan smiled. Didn't he even know that her name was Anne ? " Miss Burrows."

" Ah, Miss Burrows ! She has not been able to do much for us. She has been kept at the office."

Susan wondered.

She looked at him. He had fastened the lid of the basket, and was fanning himself with his hat. John always felt the heat. It was easy to see that his thoughts were still busy with the church, but in his relaxed and lazy figure there was little to suggest the prophet. For which very reason Susan's imagination stirred. She felt towards him as she would have felt towards any one, man or child, who was about to get his heart's desire.

" Next Sunday will be a great day for you, John, won't it ? " she said.

He answered simply, " I think it will."

" After the work of all these years ! "

" I have had the idea of a church," he told her, " since the first day I began."

" You have never wanted to do anything else ? "

Her tone suggested an implication that made him say, " Don't you think it has been enough ? "

"I think," she said, "the romance of it is quite immense."

He saw that the implication had not been there. "The first years were certainly hard," he admitted. "As you know, the church could not have been built without my father's help, and his sympathy has been rather a long time in coming. I seemed in those early days to be a rather unprofitable dreamer."

Susan smiled. "And now your dream stands waiting for you—chancel and nave, altar and spire, and all!"

"Waiting for the future," he said.

Susan looked behind her to see how the child was getting on. Kitty, sitting on the close-cropped turf, was still very busy with her bear.

"Oh, darling," Susan said, "you have made teddy look gay!"

Kitty picked up one of the flowers that had fallen from teddy's neck. "They won't stay on," she said.

"Never mind! The ones on his head are lovely."

She turned back to John.

"It rather adds to the romance, doesn't it," she said, "that we should happen to be talking up here?"

He answered a little vaguely. "It is certainly a romantic spot."

"I am not thinking of the view," she said.

"Of the stones?"

"Yes. It does add to the romance, doesn't it, that the poor old things should be listening to you?"

"You give them ears?"

"Oh yes, I give them ears. They have been very much interested. You stand, don't you, John, for the latest of religious ideas?"

"That is not how I should put it myself."

"Well, you do. And they, poor old things, go back to some of the oldest. Think of all that has happened *in between*!"

"We have made a long journey," he said.

"Think of all that has happened in between," she

repeated. " Think of all the things that have come and gone —the altars, the sacrifices, the priests, the churches, the sects, the persecutions, the martyrdoms, the beliefs, the superstitions, the gods ! They have come and gone, come and gone, and for you and me, as we sit here at this moment, they have all been more or less of a delusion ! "

" No," he protested, " not for me. Behind the crudest of the old superstitions have lain intimations of an ultimate reality."

Susan looked into the distance of her golden and sunlit scene. " There is something very much older," she said.

" Even than the superstitions ? "

" Something that has, as it were, been looking on all the time."

He met her with a touch of playfulness. " And looking on . . . a little ironically ? "

Susan smiled. " Ah, you have found me out ! In any case," she added, " it has managed to keep its secret."

" No, not from you."

" Not from me ? "

" Haven't you discovered its irony ? "

" It is *I* who put the irony into it."

" I think you put pity, too."

" Once upon a time, perhaps. Now I have too many doubts about it."

The tone of his next words startled her. " Give it the benefit of your doubts," he said. It seemed to her that the air had been suddenly changed.

She tried to laugh it off. " The universe will get on all right, I expect, whether I have doubts or not."

He made no answer. Had he heard ? She felt she must look and see. She found his eyes waiting for her. She could not tell what it was she saw in them, but everything seemed suddenly to have changed. She had a queer feeling that his eyes had been waiting for her a very long time—waiting, she could almost have fancied, since their talk in that dreadful dawn. She could not look away. He held her by

tne sheer intensity of the claim he made—the sheer yearning of his appeal. She lost the desire to look away. Whatever it was she saw in his face, it was something she had never seen there before. She was conscious of a strange unreasoning hope. Was it possible, could it be, that her uncertainty was about to end?—and to have the end for which she so deeply craved? Quite without knowing it, she smiled.

"Why do you smile?" he asked.

"Am I smiling?" she said. "Possibly something is going to happen!"

"I don't understand," he told her.

"No, but *I* am going to, perhaps!"

For a moment she looked away.

When she met his eyes again, the appeal had sensibly deepened. "Doubts are not pleasant things, you know."

She saw he understood her now. "It is not your fault," he said. "Our doubts are beyond our control. But"—his voice sank very low—"it is a terrible thing to be doubted."

"I know, I know," she murmured.

"Not from your own experience. You have always been loved."

"People have been very kind to me."

"And you have loved in return."

"Oh, don't, John, don't," she pleaded.

But he was beyond leaving off. "I am the only one."

"The only one?"

"Whom you cannot trust."

The pain of it made her cry, "But I do trust you, John. You know I do!"

"Not in the things that mean happiness to you."

She clutched at any straw she could. "I'm a little mad," she said.

"No. It is not mad to have a high ideal."

"A high ideal—I?"

"Of what companionship in marriage should mean."

She laughed. "And what sort of a companion have I been to you?"

"You have given me all the sympathy you could."

"Sympathy? Why, I have given you nothing but discouragement!"

"Criticism is not discouragement," he said. "If I could be discouraged by criticism, I should have given up years ago! You have helped me to strengthen my case."

There was a good deal of the old John in that. Possibly there was a shade too much. "You're a born fighter, aren't you, John?"

"Agreement may be a tame thing," he admitted.

She was conscious of a slight drawing back. She had no wish to be reminded of the old John just then. It was essential, indeed, that she should not be reminded of him if her confidence in this other John was to strengthen and grow. She seized on the thought of his work, which was one of the matters that troubled her most.

"And yet—" she began.

"Tell me," he said.

"And yet I can't help feeling—

"Tell me," he repeated.

"I felt it just now . . . that you *are* a little discouraged."

He did not answer for a moment or two. "Perhaps—a little."

"About your work?"

"A little, perhaps."

"This is what I have always been so afraid of!"

"But not, I expect, in the sense you mean. As my vision has widened, my faith has grown stronger and deeper. But when one part of one's life has been darkened—"

"—a shadow creeps over the rest?"

"Something like that," he said.

"It's what I have always wanted so much *not* to happen!"

"You need not reproach yourself. I have failed where I should never have expected to succeed."

"You have failed," she laughed, "because I have been a perfect fool."

" If you had been that," he said, " my vanity would not have suffered."

The word startled her. " *Is* it vanity, do you think ? "

" I have wished to be as fine as you."

In this there was a note that jarred. She turned her head and looked at him. He was merely gazing at the landscape below, and did not see that her eyes were on him. Somehow his face, as she saw it now, brought old thoughts of him back. " What in the world is there fine about me ? "

" The way you have borne your disappointment."

" But I *haven't* ! I have made a hopeless mess of it. I ought never to have let you find out."

He smiled. " That was my cleverness," he said. And again the old John was there.

Something within her gave way. " Oh, John, John," she cried, " all this is horribly wrong ! It's no good our talking like this. It's splendid of you to say these things. No one could be more generous. But it doesn't help. I don't want you to say these things. Really I don't. We are not getting any nearer to one another. We are pulling one barrier down only to put up another."

" Barrier ? "

" Well, fine words do make a barrier, don't they ? "

" I don't see why they should."

" Ah, perhaps that's just it ! "

" Just what ? "

" Why it is so difficult for us to understand one another."

" I don't follow you," he said.

" No, I dare say not. I expect I am not worth following."

" I have said nothing I have not felt."

" Oh yes, John, I realise that. It comes naturally to you to say these splendid things."

" Is that why you don't believe in them ? "

" But I do ! What I mean is that if we were really right with one another, there would be no need to talk like this."

" No, I suppose that's true," he admitted.

They were silent for several minutes. At last he said, " Shall I tell you what *my* feeling is ? "

" Yes, John, tell me."

" I feel as if I were fighting a shadow. A terrible shadow. A shadow more real than any tangible concrete thing. Something terribly real, but always beyond my reach. What you are telling me is that nothing I can say or do will make any difference to you—any difference in the way you feel towards me. And yet . . . why ! Why do you feel like this ? What is it in me that you find so impossible to forgive ? "

Susan felt that she must do one of two things : either she must let herself go and just cry like a child, or she must hold herself in and be magnificently self-controlled. It was for self-control that she found herself trying. And the extraordinary part of it was that she had to try so little. For the next few minutes she possessed, or seemed to possess, some strange new gift or power. She had never known anything like it ! Her brain grew wonderfully clear ; words came to her with a most unusual ease. Only there was just this : all the time a Susan within her was only a tiny way from tears.

" Remember what I said just now, John. I am a little mad."

His answer came very quickly. " No, that you are certainly not. You are only too terribly sane."

" *Terribly* ? "

" Your sincerity is a very terrible thing."

For the first time she spoke with bitterness. " It was you who put that weapon into my hand. Sincerity is a word I detest."

" But we couldn't go on pretending."

" No, I dare say we couldn't. But haven't pretences a way of coming true sometimes ? One may end by being the thing one has pretended to be."

" You speak as a woman, I suppose."

"But I speak only for myself. Plenty of women are possessed by a demon of truth."

"It wouldn't have done," he said. "One can't go on living with a bandage over one's eyes."

"But a bandage should be left on a wound, don't you think? It does a wound no good to look at it."

His old pride in her made him smile. "You are very clever, you know."

"If you had said *hard*—"

"Yes, that, too, a little, perhaps."

She laughed. "This is much better, John. I would rather have this than the splendid things."

"You are very, very strong, I think."

"It's about the last thing in the world I feel!"

"You come of a race that has always had its way."

"Not its women," she demurred. "They have just suffered and loved like the rest."

He turned the sad words over. "Suffered and loved," he echoed. "It's a tragic way of summing them up."

"Yes . . . when one comes to think of it."

"Suffered and loved," he repeated. "Loved very often, I suspect, simply because they suffered."

"You don't mean suffered because they loved?"

"No. Women love very often simply because they suffer. They love to fill the void. They love to escape incompleteness. They cling passionately, desperately, to love as a refuge from great disappointment. But love can never be the last word even between men and women. It could never have been the last word between us. If you had believed in my love for you, or if you had been able to give me love yourself, the disappointment would have come all the same. I could never have met your needs. It might have taken you longer to discover it, but you would have discovered it in the end. Our deepest needs are always lying in wait for us. We have always to face them in the end. And it is when we have perceived our deepest needs that our sincerity becomes so terrible."

Suddenly, as suddenly as it had seemed to come to her, her self-control gave way. The tears, to which she had been so near all along, prevailed over her last resistance.

For a moment or two he did not know. "But our sincerity," he went on, "terrible as it is, almost impossible as it may be to endure, is the best thing we have to give. What you have given me, though you do not know it, is something I need far more than love. This is the tragedy of it. I take, but I cannot give. I have always to leave you unsatisfied. . . ."

Susan had buried her face in her hands. It happened at last that he looked at her.

He grew very still.

"Don't, Susan," he said.

His voice had a note of tenderness.

"Don't, Susan," he said again. The tenderness in his voice had deepened.

"Don't, my dear," he pleaded.

Had she ever heard this note in his voice before? She lifted her head, and wiped away her tears. Once more—it was for the last time but one if she had known it—his eyes were fixed on hers. When at last she looked away, it seemed to her that she had lived a whole long life—had lived at least through all the years of her marriage. All the first and the last things of life lay in the depth of his gaze. It was a moment of strange finality. But when her eyes had left his face, she was conscious of nothing but bewilderment. The sunlight, the heather, the view, the woods and fields in the distance, appeared entirely unreal. Nothing was real but the depth she had seen in his eyes. And yet, after all, what had she seen? What did she really know?

She remembered the child.

She changed her position and called to her. "Kitty."

There was no answer.

"Kitty," she called again.

As there was still no answer, she turned quite round so

that she could see the place where the child had sat. Kitty was no longer there.

Susan started to her feet.

Kitty was not in the open space roughly enclosed by the stones. Susan was instantly afraid.

" She's gone," she cried.

John, too, rose to his feet.

For a moment or two neither of them saw the child. Then Susan, looking down the track that led to the top of the quarry, saw Kitty standing on the edge.

V

They spared her as much as they could.

Even the people, to whose questions she was obliged to reply, the people in the Parish Room that served the purpose of a court, were content with very simple answers. To most of them the catastrophe appeared as inevitable as the attempt had been heroic and superb. He had given his life for the child. The fact was too clear to need much evidence to support it. There had been only one thing to be done, and without hesitation he had done it. There had been only one chance of a rescue : he had taken it and defied the risk. Susan had watched the beginning of his descent, but was not able to remember the moment in which he fell.

The sacrifice had not been useless.

When Susan had reached the foot of the quarry, she had found the child unconscious, but not very gravely hurt. Hepworth was already dead.

PART IX

I

Without, the November afternoon was soft and bright, and London, smoky and vague and dim, lay veiled in a sunlit gloom ; within the church, the imperfect light gave a greyness to the pillared shadows of the aisles and nave, and the marble of the altar, on the tessellated pavement of the apse, had an effect of ghostly whiteness.

The church was empty and still, and the two women, who neither spoke nor moved, left the beneficent stillness undisturbed. Their meeting had been by chance, and their silence betokened that they were not quite ready to use it ; neither yet knew what to do with an opportunity which meant so much to her, for which she had longed, and which she had also dreaded. In each was the sense of a nearness that made needless recourse to speech ; in each a dependence on the other that made the risk of words too great. They were sitting in the nave, their faces towards the altar, a symbol to the one of an ideal faith, a symbol to both, with its crown of thorns, of the bitter reward of life's victories.

Susan was the first to speak. " It is good to find you here," she said.

" It is good for me, too," Anne answered.

" This is my last time. Everything will come to an end to-morrow. While I have had the house, it has not seemed quite the end."

" To-morrow you go to your brother ? "

" Just for a week or two. Until my new home is ready."

" It is near your brother's ? "

" There will not be more than a mile or so between us."

" I am glad of that. It will mean a great deal to you to have your brother so near."

" And I shall have Kitty."

" Some day, perhaps," Anne said, " that will mean still more."

" Yes. But it frightens me a little. To feel I shall always be responsible for her. . . ."

Anne's quiet voice was steady. " I think it is what you need."

" To have some one, you mean, who needs *me* ? "

" As only a child does need one."

" For everything ! For all one has to give ! "

" That's it," Anne said. " For all one has to give." To which she added, " And there was her mother. One can hardly realise what your promise must have meant to her."

" I feel that, too." Susan said. " I think it helped her to die in peace."

They were silent for some little time. The church was very still, but its stillness was faintly troubled by the dim murmur from the city below, as the stillness of a buried pool may be troubled by the reflection of moving leaves. At intervals the passing of a vehicle in the road outside brought harsher sounds more near, and made one or two of the windows rattle. The empty rows of the rush-seated chairs had the look of a kind of expectation, as if their emptiness were to be taken as a waiting for absent people to return. A ray of sunlight from a window hidden from Susan by a pillar fell on the ledge of the pulpit. The brass of the book-rest grew bright in momentary defiance of the shadows. Susan watched the gay little gleams. They went out as suddenly as they had come. When they were gone, the greyness of the shadows deepened.

" Don't you find it hard to believe," Susan asked, " that he has never preached here ? One feels, somehow, as if some day he must ! "

" Some day he will," Anne said.

Susan turned to her.

" Some day he will come again."

" Come again ? "

" We wait for his second coming."

" I don't understand."

" He will speak with another's voice. His message lives. Some day another voice will make it heard."

" You think another voice will be found ? "

" It was his own faith. He worked in the present, but it was for the future he lived."

" Especially, it seemed to me, in those last months," Susan said. " Did you notice no difference in him ? "

" Sometimes, perhaps. But he always looked far ahead. The fact that the world was not ready for his message never seemed to discourage him. I think it deepened his faith."

" He was disinterested. His religion was a generous thing."

" Yes, it left us free—left all that is best in us free. It was a religion for many needs. He knew how many good sides we have, and therefore how many good needs."

" He had so many sides himself."

" It was that that made him so human and lovable."

Susan did not answer for a moment or two. " That is what I ought to have seen."

" Isn't it possible," Anne said, " that to see some things one must not be too near them ? "

" You are kind, Anne dear, but it would never have been like that with you. You saw only the best in him."

" That was my great happiness," Anne said.

Again the stillness was left undisturbed. But the shadows were growing more dim. The approach of dusk had begun to steal into the short-lived autumn day.

" What you gave him was a beautiful thing," Susan said.

" Mercifully, he never knew ! "

" It would have been more tragic if he had."

" It would have been more than I could have borne."

Susan corrected her. " No. I do not mean what you think. I mean that if things had been different, if I had not been there, if circumstances had been altogether different, if you could have given him the wonderful gift of your understanding and your love, it would have been much more tragic for you."

" I don't understand," Anne said.

" I mean," Susan went on, " it is better it was I who found it out. I had so much less to give."

" What was it you found ? " Anne asked.

" Something it would have been very hard for you to bear—seeing what you had to give."

" Tell me," Anne said.

" That he would not have used your gift."

" He would have had no need of it ? "

" He had no real need of either of us."

" But there would have been the giving."

" Ah, but would that have been enough ? "

This time Anne's voice was far from steady. " I don't know," she said.

Susan understood the depth of Anne's admission, and sat for some moments measuring it. " Have I hurt you, dear ? "

Anne gently laid her hand on Susan's.

" I don't want to ! "

Anne took Susan's hand in hers. " You have no need to tell me."

" But we both have the future to face," Susan said. " And I want you to feel— "

" I understand. You want to help me—help me to feel—"

" That you had all the best there was. There was nothing better."

" Not even for you ? "

" No. He had no real need of either of us. We are at one in that. He has left us with a strange kind of bond between us. He came into both our lives . . . but he never really wanted us ! And he is tremendously with us still, different as our memories must be."

" With me—more and more," Anne said.

" Because death has given him to you."

" Yes, that is what I feel. I do no wrong now."

" In loving him ? "

" Yes," Anne said, " in loving him."

The shadows grew more dim. Something more restful than expectation was suggested by the emptiness of the rush-seated chairs. It seemed not to matter very much whether the absent returned or not—the church was achieving its purpose. The great benediction of its silence filled the sacred and dedicated place. It was no longer on its own ideals that the altar appeared to be insisting : it had become a symbol of peace—the peace of all deep believing. It was as if the shadows covered all that was transient in the travail of the minds and imaginations of men, their fancies and their fears, their faith in transitory gods : it was as if the silence proclaimed itself as older than all worship, older than all words, unchanging and the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

" Anne," Susan said.

" Yes, my dear."

" It *is* strange, isn't it, the way he has left us together ? "

" Yes, it's strange, but I am very grateful for it."

" It does help, you feel ? "

" It has helped me. I only wish I could have done more for you."

" You have done a great deal, you know."

" Not so much as I could have wished. Your going away will be a dreadful loss, but for your sake I am very glad. You will begin a new life to-morrow."

" No, Anne, not a new life, I think. Only a new phase."

" Don't say that," Anne pleaded.

Susan waited a moment or two. " I am afraid."

" What have you to be afraid of ? "

" Myself—my memories."

" Time will soften them for you."

" It hasn't so far. Some memories seem to grow more distinct. If only he had not died in that terrible way ! "

" Yes, it was a terrible way. To think that a life so precious as his was sacrificed "—Anne's voice was scarcely audible —" for a small life only just beginning. . . ."

" Irony can seldom have been more cruel." But for Susan the irony had a meaning that it could not have for Anne.

" He was very brave," Anne said. " He gave his life. What more can any one do ? Isn't that the great test of us all ? When the moment comes, dare we, *can* we ? Isn't that the great Yes or No ? "

" His answer was clear enough," Susan said. " He never hesitated for an instant. I tried to prevent him—I couldn't. And it wasn't that he didn't know. He saw the danger perfectly. I told him he couldn't do it. ' I will try,' he said. He thought of nothing but the child."

" Yes, his answer was very clear," Anne said.

" But somehow that makes it worse. I was really responsible."

" No. No one blames you in the least. Every one knows it was one of those accidents it is almost impossible to foresee."

" Certainly no one, who knows the place, has blamed us. The quarry was a long way off—a long way, I mean, for a small child like Kitty. We both believed, both John and I, that she was absolutely safe. I am thinking of something different. What I mean is that, but for me, Kitty would not have been there at all. It was I who brought her. It was I who "—Susan held back for a moment or two—" brought her into his life."

Anne's commonsense demurred. " I don't think this is quite reasonable."

" Perhaps not. I don't know. But there is something so much worse."

" Worse ? "

" It is hard to tell you. It haunts me, but I shrink from putting it into words."

" Perhaps if it haunts you—"

" Yes, I want to tell you. But it's so difficult."

Anne's voice was very gentle. " Tell me, dear."

" It's the awful look he gave me."

" Look ? "

" Just before he began to descend. When he had rescued Kitty from the bush, he found he could not climb up again. The earth was much too loose. He couldn't stay where he was, because the ledge was crumbling away. There was nothing for it but to try to climb down to the bottom. He stood for a moment holding on to the bush, with Kitty in his other arm. He raised his face, and looked at me. It was an awful look. It said as plainly as if he had spoken, ' I know, I know ! *Even now* you don't believe in me ! ' And the horrible part of it is that somehow, somewhere, down in the depth of me, I felt he was right ! I didn't. At least I was not absolutely sure. And my face must have shown it. Think of it—at a moment like that ! The last thing he ever saw in me. . . ."

Anne put her arm round Susan, and drew her close. " Hush, my dear. You mustn't. You mustn't talk like this. You mustn't. There's no truth in it. I am certain he never looked like that, and saw nothing like that in you. I am quite certain of it. You must put it completely away."

" It haunts me, Anne."

" It mustn't. It's not true. It's simply an effect of the shock. It was enough to unhinge any one."

" But the doubt was there."

" No, not a moment like that ! "

" Deep down in me somewhere."

" Oh, my dear, don't dwell on it."

" And it must have shown in my face."

Anne drew Susan closer still, and kissed her. " It's your grief and your self-reproach," she said. " They have taken this dreadful form, because it was such a dreadful thing."

" I shall always see the look he gave me."

" Oh no, a day will come. . . ."

" But it shouldn't ! It was a judgment on me."

" That's how we always feel. When great catastrophes come to us, we always have this feeling."

" That we are responsible for them ? "

" In one way or another."

" But I *was* responsible. Wasn't I responsible for having spoilt his life ? "

Anne smiled very gently. " But *did* you ? "

Susan gave a most unhappy little laugh. " I don't know ! He suffered more than I thought he would."

Anne let Susan release herself a little from her arm. " You have told no one at all ? "

" I have had no one to tell."

" That's it. You have been brooding and brooding. We all do it—we can't help ourselves. But we mustn't, if we wish to see things clearly. All along I think . . . may I say it ? "

" Yes, Anne, say it."

" You have reproached yourself more than you need. You gave him more than you know. Love has strange ways, makes us think strange things."

" You mean that all along perhaps— "

" Yes," Anne said, " you loved him."

Susan shook her head. " No. But I always hoped he'd make me."

They were silent. Many moments passed.

At last Susan said, " There is one reproach I shall never escape."

Anne waited.

" That I never learnt to know him."

" Wasn't there a good deal to know ? "

" Yes—but think of the chance I had ! I missed it. All those years I missed it. I never knew him."

The dusk had come.

The two women sat on, and let the stillness about them deepen. They sat on, their faces towards the symbol of pain and the symbol of peace, very lonely in their separate sorrows, very near in their common need of the confessional of the silence and the shadows.

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